

THEOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY FOR CREATIVE
AND ARTISTIC PREACHING

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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This professional project, completed by

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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
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ABSTRACT

Concern for the state of preaching in the main-line churches in North America is the motivational source for the development of this professional project. The underlying assumptions are that the state of preaching is oppressed and oppressing, and that this is a direct result of the theology and methodology which has been used in the training of pastoral leadership.

The project proposes a way of doing hermeneutics of text and context as the most critical theological question to be reworked in the minds of preachers. A suggestive look is then taken at the preaching of Jesus and Jesus the preacher, exploring how he used hermeneutics and creative process.

The methodological portion of the project proposes an understanding of the preacher as artist and preaching as art. The concern here is to see the sermon as an art event, with the preacher as the facilitating artist. Finally, the project suggests a process for sermon development, in dialogue with the preaching literature, which might facilitate creative and artistic preaching.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of reflection time has been invested over the last years of my life around the question of what it means to be an effective pastor. The scope of such reflection is incredibly broad, for pastors keep company with Bartholomew of the thousand hats, wearing so many different hats, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes changing them moment by moment.

At the center of my reflection, however, is the relationship of effective pastoral leadership to the effectiveness of preaching. A healthy church is often a sign of effective, vital preaching of the Gospel. The statistical data on the decline of the mainline churches is common knowledge, and while there are diverse factors involved in this phenomena, I propose that one of the distinct factors is the state of the art of preaching.

Active participation in the church, as a pastor, with a serious commitment to preaching seriously limits opportunities to listen first-hand to preaching as it happens. Working at the task of being a pastor and preaching regularly does not preclude, however, some very active listening on the side. The focus of some of this listening has been the feedback in the church from pastors and from those who sit faithfully in the pews. We, who work week

upon week in the pulpits of churches ought not to underestimate the listening skills of our audiences, and their capacity to discern the state of the art of preaching.

My conversations with preachers and parishioners leads me to believe that the current state of preaching in the mainline churches, where I live and work, is both oppressed and oppressing. Too often the preachers in this particular arena are bound into theology and methodology which restricts the possibility of the Word being fully alive; listeners, in turn, are subjected to preaching which is often boring at best and deadly at its worst.

I am convinced that we are reaping the harvest of what we have sown. The state of the art of preaching reflects precisely the kind of theology and methodology we have taught in our seminaries. Furthermore, I am convinced that the art of preaching will only change if fundamental changes are made in the theological and methodological roots of our preaching.

Three issues emerge as the foci of my concern:

1. We have trained our pastors very well in the field of exegesis, but we have not equipped them to do hermeneutics, to effectively do interpretation of both text and context. An assumption that exegetical skills would lead automatically to effective hermeneutics has not consistently borne such fruit.

2. Our training in exegetical process has depended heavily on rational/logical/mechanical modes of

sermon development, failing to unleash the broadest creative potential of our preachers. We have thus locked pastors into processes which are difficult to break out of, even guilt producing to break out of.

3. The result of our theology and methodology is that we produce pastors who are mechanics and academics rather than artists. Sermons come out sounding like lectures rather than word events, like apologies rather than compelling invitations to faith, like "I have heard this one before," rather than a new breath of fresh air for the weary soul.

There are exceptions, of course. Here and there preachers emerge who stand as contradictions to the concern I raise. They are preachers who are able to use the methodology with extraordinary creativity or who have extraordinary gifts. Or they are preachers, like Eugene Lowry, who have consciously or unconsciously scrapped the old methodologies in favor of other methodologies which have worked for them.

Lowry expresses this shift and the pain of abandoning the old for something new;

I used to feel guilty about the sermon which seemed to have its own demands and desires. Its flavor and movement just would not be restricted to three points, and I knew I was violating the principles of sermon making I had been taught! Yet, this organic developmental kind of sermon took less preparation time and it "preached" better.¹

¹Eugene L. Lowry, The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon As Narrative Art Form (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980) p. 13.

Theology and methodology for more creative and artistic preaching is what this project is all about. Four discussion areas emerge. The first looks seriously at finding a way of doing hermeneutics, of text and context to create a seedbed for effective, exciting, creative and artistic preaching. The seedbed, I would propose, is located finally neither in the text nor the context, but in the tension, the convergence and divergence, the dialogue between the two realities.

The second area will re-examine Jesus, his preaching and his life style, looking for clues of how he worked hermeneutics, of how he lived in the tension of text and context, and how that served as a source for his extraordinary creative energy.

Thirdly, I want to explore how we might understand preaching as art and preachers as artists. The intent is to free preachers to express the Gospel more creatively and discover new goals for excellence in their profession.

Finally, a proposal for a model for sermon development emerges. The model will seek to be less restrictive in comparison with other models, while still providing a process for sermon development which might unleash the creative potential of the preacher engaged in the text and context.

Chapter 2

TOWARD A WORKING HERMENEUTIC

Martin Marty, who has such great gifts as a historian-theologian, tells the story of a certain golfer who mistook a mushroom for his golf ball on the fairway and stroked it into oblivion, while his ball lay undisturbed fifteen feet away. A great debate arose on whether or not the stroke counted. The debate was resolved when it was discovered there was no rule against hitting a mushroom, even if the intent was to hit the ball.

Marty goes on to observe that a great many of us, and he leans heavily on preachers, think we are swinging at the ball in our work, but wind up in the fungus, while the ball nestles undisturbed in the grass fifteen feet away.¹

My concern, in this chapter, is to explore theology and methodology in order to facilitate the process of sorting out the golf ball from the fungus. There can be no effective preaching unless the preacher operates with some kind of methodology which equips him to discern quickly and precisely the difference between a sea of mushrooms, all of which may look remarkably like a golf ball, and the real ball which needs to be stroked.

The quest for this kind of methodology and theology leads rather naturally into the theological arena of

¹Martin Marty, "M.E.M.O.", Christian Century, 99:38 (December 1982) 1239.

hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is that field which deals with the interpretation of written texts, but also has come to be understood as the process of doing interpretation as it might apply to event or society or culture.

On the surface it would seem that the parish pastor, in search of theology and methodology under the banner of hermeneutics would simply need to invade the nearest theological library and discover there a wealth of resources to inform the task. Indeed, a wealth of resources exist, but they are not so immediately accessible. I believe that the preacher who begins this kind of quest must hold a number of issues in clear focus, to establish a kind of grid to serve as a filter.

First, the preacher needs to begin by being utterly aware of the importance of his own context, the setting in which he lives and works. The reality of this context may be defined in terms of:

1) It is the place where he or she works, relates, and wrestles with doing hermeneutics... and that place is the parish ministry.

2) This context is one which has been/is being chosen as a context in which to invest time, energy and gifts.

3) The choosing of a context involves choosing geography, politics, social and economic issues, and a people.

4) All choices involve saying "yes" to some things

and saying "no" to other things. The commitments involved always contain life and death.

5) One of the elements of the choice is a language world; the language goes with the geography, the politics, the social and economic issues and the people.

6) Saying "yes" to a language world involves a commitment to live and work with it.

The clear definition of the context is terribly important in beginning the quest, because it is so easy to get lost in the world of hermeneutics! Entering the world of depth hermeneutical study is entering in every sense another world of language, removed from the context of the preacher in the parish.

To define this arena as another world does not mean, of course, that we should not enter herein. It leads rather to a new set of questions: Is it possible to contract a kind of hermeneutical circle into this other world which would inform the preacher's context? Are there any mediating vehicles which might facilitate the development of such a hermeneutical circle? What voice or voices in that other world would be most helpful or most informative to the context in which the preacher lives and works? Is it finally possible to construct a practical hermeneutic, a hermeneutic which works in the heat of the battle in the parish?

Finally, it is vital to operate in this quest with some suitable preconditions or criteria. I would suggest four:

1) A practical hermeneutic must take seriously the context of the hermeneuticist, in a wholistic sense, without prejudgment.

2) The methodology would not restrict in any way the critical questions arising from the context in its address to Scripture.

3) The methodology would permit and encourage interpretive novelty in the face of the questions arising from the context.

4) The address of the testimony of Scripture to the context would be taken seriously.

A number of sources have come to the fore as I have worked with these questions, sources which seem at this point to be helpful. First, I want to look at the work of the Liberation Theologians, followed by a model from the work of David Tracy, and then a look at the thinking of Paul Ricoeur, who stands as a significant influence behind both the Liberation Theologians and David Tracy.

The conclusion of this chapter will attempt to pull together the threads which emerge and which might form the fabric of a practical hermenutic for a parish pastor.

THE SOURCES

Liberation Theology

One of the most creative new forces in theology, emerging largely in the last two decades, is the group

of theologians known as Liberation Theologians. In the Southern Hemisphere this group is represented by men such as Gutierrez, Segundo, Croatto and Miguez Bonino; and in North America, they are represented by James Cone, doing Black Theology, and Feminists like Letty Russell and Phyllis Trible.

These theologians are conscious and intentional in their use of hermeneutics. In fact, their hermeneutical methodology may well be the key to understanding and appropriating their theological endeavors.

Juan Luis Segundo proposes a comprehensive model of a hermeneutical circle as a base point for working his theology, defining four factors:

Firstly, there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. Secondly, there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. Thirdly, there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the pervading interpretation on the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. Fourthly, we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith, (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal.²

²Juan Luis Segundo, Liberation of Theology (Mary-Kno11: Orbis Books, 1976) p. 9.

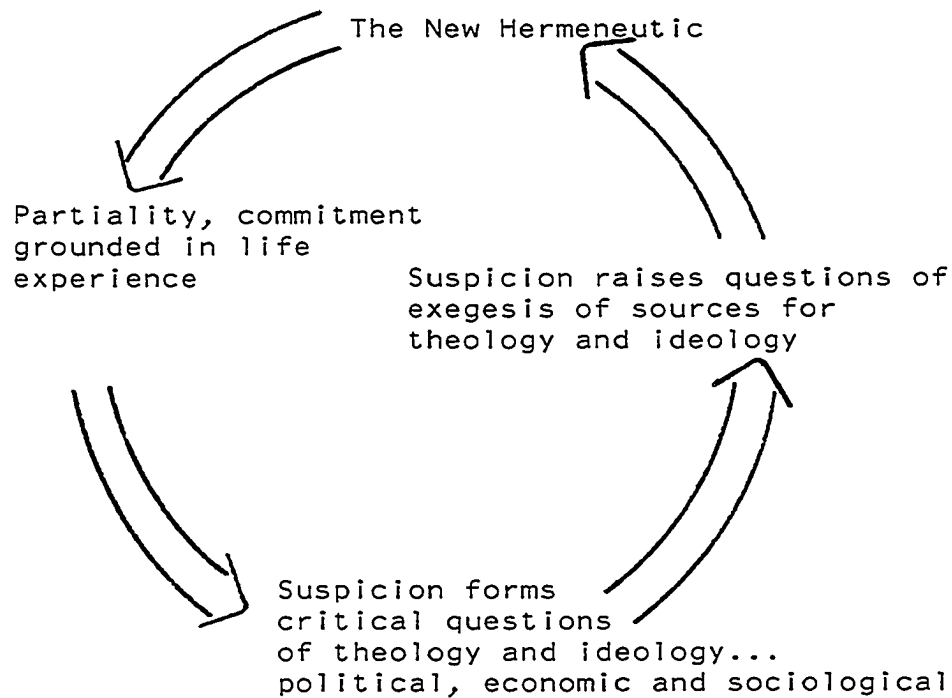


Fig. 1 The Hermeneutical Circle of Juan Luis Segundo³

Two preconditions qualify this model: one:

That the questions rising out of the present be rich enough, general enough, and basic enough to force us to change our customary conceptions of life, death, knowledge, society, politics, and the world in general.⁴

The second precondition is that the new questions will change our "customary interpretations of the Scriptures."⁵ If these preconditions are not met, the process of the circle is considered to be broken.

The hermeneutical circle of Segundo provides a vehicle for looking at the larger arena of Liberation

³This Model is my own interpretation of Segundo.

⁴Segundo, p. 8.

⁵Ibid., p. 9.

Theology. An examination of the four aspects of the circle reveals some common lines through the liberation corpus.

Context. Segundo is terribly clear about the starting point of the hermeneutical circle. While it might be called perspectival by some interpreters, the freight carried by this point is deeper. I choose to call it "context" and underline Segundo's use of the word "experience" in defining it. The context is more than just a way of looking at life and the hermeneutical process; it is rather a point where life is experienced; and there experienced as an oppressed people.

The ethos of this statement is emphasized by Segundo in saying that the issue for academic theologians may be the "death of God," but for Liberation Theology the danger is "the death of the theologians."⁶

James Cone is equally sensitive about the need to discuss context in terms of experience:

There can be no black theology which does not take seriously the black experience--a life of humiliation and suffering.⁷

The black experience is the environment in which black people live. It is the totality of black experience in a white world where babies are tortured, women are raped and men are shot.⁸

Phyllis Tribble follows a somewhat more perspectival approach, but is quite conscious that she writes as a

⁶Ibid., p. 26

⁷James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970) p. 54.

⁸Ibid., p. 55

feminist, describing her work as "feminist hermeneutics."⁹

There is a unanimity among these theologians in the utter seriousness of doing theology from a given context with an acknowledged partiality. They would argue, in turn, that all theology is written with a partiality, whether or not it is acknowledged.

The importance of context is further clarified by a conviction that the redemptive, liberative Gospel is uniquely a Gospel to the oppressed. They join their voices with Jurgen Moltmann in saying, "the Kingdom of God comes to those who labor and are heavy laden... to the humiliated and the abused."¹⁰

Ideological and Theological Superstructures. From this life experience, this partiality, comes a critical suspicion of the ideological and theological superstructures of society. Segundo insists that nothing less than suspicion will enable the theologian to push beneath the current situation. The oppressor and the oppressive systems hide and hallow themselves "behind ideologies that obscure."¹¹

James Cone acknowledges how difficult this task is:

Since black theologians are trained in white seminaries and white thinkers make decisions about the structure and scope of theology, it is not possible for black religionists to separate themselves immediately from white thought.¹²

⁹Phyllis Tribble, God and The Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) p. XVII.

¹⁰Jurgen Moltmann, Religion, Revolution and the Future (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969) pp. 103-104.

¹¹Segundo, p. 27.

¹²Cone, p. 117.

Cone is clear that the oppressed must stop "taking their cues from the oppressors. "New wine cannot be placed in 'old wineskins.'"¹³ His suspicion carries over further to "so-called white revolutionary theologians," who propose to speak for black people.¹⁴

The feminist theologians are faced with the dilemma of being trained in traditionally male dominated institutions, in theological systems rooted almost exclusively in white, male theology.

So the initial task of looking with critical suspicion at the ideological and theological superstructures, is to get past the blindness of being shaped and molded by them.

A second task is to recognize that we are dealing with ideologies and theologies at the point of our society. We tend to label as ideological those things which are alien to our environment, without acknowledging the very ideological nature of the systems we work within.

Segundo is indeed correct that nothing less than a "pervasive suspicion" will enable the theologian to push down to new depths in the hermeneutical process.¹⁵

Exegesis and the Sources. Segundo continues his hermeneutical circle with a continuing suspicion, pushing down in his third step to the exegetical and interpretive foundations of the status quo theology and ideology. He sharpens this issue, saying, "the important thing is not so

¹³Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁵Segundo, p. 9.

much to accept the accustomed answers of theology, but rather not to shoulder the accustomed questions of theology."¹⁶

Cone expresses a concern to avoid the kind of literal exegetical work which has been so damaging to the Black community. The traditional literalism, which built on phrases such as, "slaves, obey your masters," or "blacks have been condemned to be inferior to whites," is still being used to dictate Christian responses for Black people. He concludes that, "we cannot use Jesus' behavior in the first century as a literal guide for our actions in the twentieth century."¹⁷

A major theme for Phyllis Tribble is the very fact of digging into the undergirding exegesis which has sustained a particular understanding of male-female in the Christian community and the larger culture. Working with the metaphor, "male and female," and "the image of God," in the manner of Ricoeur, Tribble is able to demonstrate an equality in stress on male and female...and goes on to discover Old Testament passages which reveal metaphors such as "God the pregnant woman (Isaiah 42:14), the mother (Isaiah 66:13), the midwife (Psalm 22:9), and the mistress (Psalm 132:2)."¹⁸

The New Hermeneutic. Phyllis Tribble has already led us into the new hermeneutic, for her basic suspicion of the existing exegetical and interpretive work led her to ask new questions of Scripture. The final step for Segundo

¹⁶Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁷Cone, p. 68.

¹⁸Tribble, p. 22.

is that new question and a new openness to the witness of Scripture, free from the dominating interpretive stances inherited from other theological positions.¹⁹

This new hermeneutic, for James Cone, happens when the biblical revelation becomes a "Black event."²⁰

As a black theologian--I want to know what God's revelation means right now as the black community participates in the struggle for liberation.²¹

There is a common insistence on the contemporaneity of Scripture. Scripture so understood is set free from any objectifying understanding grounded in a former context. Set free from dogmatic or literalistic interpretation, Scripture once again becomes a living witness in the context of the reader, which is the arena of God's redemptive activity. James Cone expresses this conviction in terms of the central theme of the New Testament.

If I read the New Testament correctly, the resurrection of Christ means that he is present today in the midst of all societies effecting his liberation of the oppressed.²²

David Tracy

A Revisionist Model. In writing his book, Blessed Rage for Order, in 1975, David Tracy spoke of the pluralism in theology, acknowledging that making such a statement today is almost a truism. Rather than looking at this pluralism negatively, David Tracy attempts to work with it and extract its blessings.

¹⁹Segundo, p. 31.

²¹Ibid., p. 64.

²⁰Cone, p. 65.

²²Ibid.

His work operates on two assumptions:

The first assumption insists that the present pluralism of theologies allows each theologian to learn incomparably more about reality by disclosing really different ways of viewing both our common humanity and Christianity... a second assumption... holds that each theologian must attempt to articulate and defend an explicit method of inquiry, and use that method to interpret the symbols and texts of our common life and of Christianity. More summarily stated, each theologian must take a stand on both the basic formal methodological and material constructive issues which face us all.²³

From these suppositions, David Tracy first reviews the basic models of doing theology and then proposes a new model, which he calls, "A Revisionist Model for Contemporary Theology."²⁴

The work of David Tracy, like the work of the Liberation Theologians, is helpful for me in my quest for a practical hermeneutic, providing something of a bridge or hermeneutical circle into the explicit thinking of the academic hermeneuticists. It is helpful, because like David Tracy, like Segundo, it is clear about methodology and methodological considerations. The hermeneutical output of the pastor-theologian (and I would argue that the most alive theological arena is the parish) finally is dependent on methodology! With solid presuppositions and correct methodology, the pastor has the possibility of doing top-notch hermeneutical discovery--at least part of the time. Without proper methodology, the chances are slim all of the time.

David Tracy proposes five theses to undergird his revisionist model.

²³David Tracy, Blessed Rage For Order (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) p. 3.

²⁴Ibid., p. 43.

FIRST THESIS: The Two Principal Sources for Theology Are Christian²⁵ Texts and Common Human Experience and Language.

Pulling together a variety of streams, he notes the sources are,

Variously labelled: "the message" as with Paul Tillich, the "kerygma" as with Rudolph Bultmann, the "Christian witness of faith" as the Schubert Ogden, "the Tradition" as with most contemporary Catholic theologians.²⁶

He also finds common themes to relate to his use of "common human experience," whether it be called the--

"Situation" as with Paul Tillich, the "contemporary scientific world view" as with Rudolph Bultmann, the contemporary phenomenon of a full fledged "historical consciousness" as the Bernard Lonergan...²⁷

David Tracy views the dialectic of these two aspects as utterly basic to being Christian and the Christian claim "to provide the authentic way to understand our common human experience."²⁸

SECOND THESIS: The Theological Task Will Involve A Critical Correlation of the Results of the Investigation of the Two Sources of Theology.²⁹

The need expressed here by David Tracy and defined by the word "critical" sounds very much like the word "suspicion" in Segundo in his second and third steps of the hermeneutic circle. While referring to Tillich as a source for articulating the need for critical correlation, Tracy does not find Tillich's approach adequate because it does not relate "Christian answers" with answers from other sources.³⁰

²⁵Ibid., p. 43.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 45.

²⁶Ibid., p. 44.

²⁸Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., p. 46.

THIRD THESIS: The Principal Method of Investigation of The Source "Common Human Experience and Language" can be described as a Phenomenology of the "Religious Dimension" Present in Everyday and Scientific Language and Experience.³¹

With this third thesis, Tracy moves from presuppositions to methodological proposals. Noting that "phenomenological method has undergone important transformations," he cites Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Scheler, the early Heidegger to the hermeneutic phenomenology of Gadamer, the late Heidegger, and Paul Ricoeur. David Tracy proposes,

Theologians might employ such a method to analyze those symbols and gestures present to our everyday life and language that may legitimately manifest a religious dimension to our lives.³²

If I read the Liberation Theologians correctly, they would contend that David Tracy's proposal is inadequate, because it ignores, at least on the surface, so many aspects of our life experiences such as ideology, politics, economics and sociology.

FOURTH THESIS: The Principal Method of Investigation of the Source "The Christian Tradition" can be described as an Historical and Hermeneutical Investigation of Classical Christian Texts.³³

I understand David Tracy to be using the word "historical" in a general and limited sense, rather than opting for a hermeneutic focusing upon the extrinsic historical research of an earlier historicism. His emphasis falls instead on the "hermeneutical investigation."

I will simply advance certain contemporary refinements of the hermeneutic tradition which seem applicable to the problem of discerning the meanings embedded in any written text--and only such developments in recent hermeneutic theory which

³¹Ibid., p. 47.

³²Ibid., pp. 47-48.

³³Ibid., p. 49.

³⁴Ibid., p. 50.

seem particularly apt for illustrating the nature of the theologian's hermeneutic commitment.³⁴

David Tracy refers to two developments of note. The first is the "process of linguistic distancing." The second is a distinction between the "sense" and the "referents," and the methods used to determine them.³⁵

I want to come back to these concepts later in looking at the work of Paul Ricoeur, but some explanation is in order. "Distancing" is a process which separates both the text and the interpreter from the original intention of the author and its original reception by the addressee. The distinction between "sense" and "referent" is a distinction of methodology. Sense can be determined by "ordinary methods of semantic and literary-critical inquiries... The referents of the text do not pertain to the meaning 'behind' the text... but to the meaning 'in front of' the text..."³⁶

FIFTH THESIS: To Determine the Truth-Status of the Results of One's Investigations Into the Meaning of Both Common Human Experience and Christian Texts the Theologian Should Employ and Explicitly Transcendental or Metaphysical Mode of Reflection.³⁷

Acknowledging that this is "the least commonly accepted position" of the five, Tracy argues that some kind of reflection is needed to determine relative "truth-value."³⁸ The question can well be raised, however, whether there is any reflective discipline capable of affirming the "truth-value" of our conclusions or proposals in the religious dimension.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

David Tracy is helpful in the quest for a practical hermeneutic in a number of ways. First, he is able to clearly state the fundamental poles of the hermeneutical circle, in terms that relate to my language, conceptual and experiential world. Secondly, he makes clear that the hermeneutical task is not simply a matter of interpretation of the Christian sources, but also, of the common human experience. Finally, he pinpoints the theological task in the correlation process, working between the two sources.

The weakness of Tracy's Revisionist Proposal, which he later acknowledges, is the lack of a "critical social theory," addressing "economic, political, cultural and social situations..."³⁹ Tracy approaches the suspicion of the Liberation Theologians, but finally avoids that position. His avoidance of such language may reflect living in a context without the kind of oppression which motivates Segundo. The ultimate value of the Revisionist Model for practical theology may well hinge on this point.

The sympathy which Tracy has for practical theology is clear:

That critical reformulation should, in principle, eventually allow Christian theologians of praxis to find words that may render that call to liberation so clear that, as Albert Camus remarked, "even the simplest man can understand its meaning." Such stark primal language was once employed in the parabolic limit-language of the New Testament. That language could again be employed with integrity if and when the long journey through hard empirical evidence and critical thought--parallel to the Christian and the Marxist long journey through

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 246-247.

the institutions--clarifies its own fundamental self-understanding. At that point, the authentic simplicity, not simple-mindedness, of the kind of life, thought, and commitment proclaimed in the Christian gospel as the true destiny of every human being might find root again; this time, in a humanity whose historical journey seems to have reached the point where we must find what values we can all unite to actualize lest we die, each clinging with ever-diminishing dignity to his own mythologies, his own ideologies, his own god.⁴⁰

Paul Ricoeur

Emerging from the work of Liberation Theology and again from David Tracy is evidence of a significant reliance on the work of Paul Ricoeur. Lewis Mudge expressed clearly the importance of his work:

For students of the theory and practice of biblical interpretation, Paul Ricoeur's work grows in importance. Philosopher without a theological degree, Christian unencumbered by ecclesiastical occupation... successor to Paul Tillich at the University of Chicago, Paul Ricoeur has produced a series of books and articles which today provoke intense discussion among those who struggle to "make sense" of the way the Bible might speak now to humankind and to the Church.⁴¹

The scope of the writing of Paul Ricoeur is so large that it becomes necessary to set rather tight limits on the discussion. I will, therefore, limit the discussion of Ricoeur to the issues and questions which emerge from the Liberationists and David Tracy.

Of the Latin Liberation Theologians, J. Severino Croatto is most specific in his reflection on the work of Ricoeur. Croatto, in his hermeneutical principles, speaks of event and events which become foundational through the effect of history.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 248.

⁴¹ Paul Ricoeur, Essays On Biblical Interpretation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) p. VII.

The greater the distance between a foundational and a founded event, the greater the density of the former's significance. This is the hermeneutical function of "distantiation" (Ricoeur--distanciation)⁴² of which Ricoeur speaks in his most recent writings.

This concept is also suggested by David Tracy as being one of the new developments in hermeneutical theory which offers possibility for new theological work.

Tracy also notes the difference between the "sense" of the text and the "referent," a distinction similarly incorporated by Croatto.

Building on Dagamer's approach, Ricoeur elaborates the notion of "the world of the text," namely, those possible meanings of the text arising from its condition as linguistic "sign" superseding the phrase and become a codified structure or composition. For interpreter the "world of the text" is something "behind" it, like the author. It opens the text to an understanding from the vantage point of its new horizon."⁴³

Phyllis Tribble acknowledges her debt to Ricoeur in the area of metaphor and the risk of interpretation. Her entire emphasis on intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors follows this lead, she quotes Ricoeur to defend her thrust, "the text is like a musical score and the reader like the orchestra conductor who obeys the instructions of the notation."⁴⁴

I would limit, then, my discussion of Ricoeur to these three: distanciation, sense and referent and the metaphor.

Distanciation. The whole discussion of distanciation follows upon an understanding of the nature of discourse

⁴²J. Severino Croatto, Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981) pp. 1-2.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴Tribble, pp. 8-9.

and event. Ricoeur distinguishes between discourse as speech event and discourse given "over to littera...", noting not only a change of medium, but the disconnection between the message and the speaker.⁴⁵ At that point, the text gains an autonomy of its own and "the text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by the author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it."⁴⁶

This autonomy of the text sets a complex dialectic of event and meaning into motion, with the author and the reader involved.

It follows that the problem of the appropriation of meaning of the text becomes as paradoxical as that of the authorship. The right of the reader and the right of the text converge in an important struggle that generates the whole dynamic of interpretation. Hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends.⁴⁷

When dialogue ends and speech becomes littera, distance begins. "Distance" is "just the actual spatial and temporal gap between us and the appearance of such a work of art or discourse."⁴⁸ The effect of distance is cultural estrangement, and the task of reading and interpreting is the overcoming of this estrangement.

Henceforth the appropriation of the past proceeds along an endless struggle with distancing. Interpretation, philosophically understood is nothing else than an attempt to make estrangement and distancing productive.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) pp. 26-29.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 44.

The process of distancing also involves the expansion of the horizon of the text. Set free from the finite world of the writer, the text gains meaning, expanding its horizon, accumulating meaning. As Ricoeur states it, "the process of distancing... is the fundamental pre-supposition for this enlarging of the horizon of the text."⁵⁰

Appropriation of the text happens when--

Reading yields something like an event, an event of discourse, which is an event in the present moment. As appropriation, interpretation becomes an event.⁵¹

This event is not some kind of romantic coincidence for Ricoeur, but something closer to what Gadamer calls a fusion of horizon: "the world horizon of the reader is fused with the world horizon of the writer."⁵²

"The concept of meaning," as David Tracy summarizes it,

is a Husserlian one adapted by Paul Ricoeur: meaning is neither a psychic nor a physical event, but is ideal or noematic. As ideal and as fixed in written texts, or in oral modes of discourse, the meaning undergoes a process of distancing from the author's intention, from the original dialogue situation, and from its first audience. At the same time, the meaning is now available in these texts for any intelligent interpreter to understand upon reading them. The interpreter's task therefore, is not to psychologize the meaning by identifying it with the speech-event of the original author's intention. Rather his task becomes the distinct one of finding methods capable of explicating the meaning of the text itself.⁵³

Sense and Referent. The discussion of the distancing process leads into the arena of the dialectic of sense and reference. Ricoeur defines his terms, stating, "the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 92.

⁵² Ibid., p. 93.

⁵³ Tracy, p. 75.

'what' of discourse is its 'sense,' the 'about what' is its reference."⁵⁴

Whereas the sense is immanent to the discourse, and objective in the sense of ideal, the reference expresses the movement in which language transcends itself. In other words, the sense correlates the identification function and the predicative function within the sentence, and the reference relates language to the world.⁵⁵

The sense of a text is very much related to meaning. We arrive at the sense of a text by intrinsic methodology, rather than extrinsic, with an underlying assumption that the text has an ideal meaning. At this point ordinary tools of semantical and literary-critical methodology are used. Again, David Tracy is helpful in detailing what this actually means in practice. He describes the development of parable interpretation, starting with the allegorizing practice long prevalent in Christian history. This practice was put to rest by the work of Julicher who refuted allegorization, looking instead to the basic moral point. C. H. Dodd and Jeremias called this practice into question with a new historical consciousness, gained through exegesis and historical criticism. We now perceive that we do not get to the meaning of a parable "by understanding either the author's intentions, or the community's, or Jesus' life situation."⁵⁶

David Tracy ends his summary by observing that recent developments incorporate "explicitly semantical and literary critical methods."

⁵⁴Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 19.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁶Tracy, p. 77.

Inasmuch as the parables are narrative expansions of a basic metaphor, it becomes imperative for any interpreter of parabolic texts to explain the structure and nature of such a narrative genre and the nature and structure of metaphor itself as linguistic expression. In short, as the recent work of Amos Wilder, Robert Funk, Norman Perrin, Dan O. Via, and Dominic Crossan shows, the interpreter of the parables must enter into the task here called "explanation" in order to determine first the "sense" of the parable itself.⁵⁷

The other side of the dialectic is "referent," which moves in the direction of--

The ontological condition of being in the world. Language is not a world of its own. It is not even a world. But because we are in the world, because we are affected by situations, and because we orient ourselves comprehensively in those situations, we have something to say, we have experience to bring to language.⁵⁸

The scope of reference is obviously tied with the discussion of distancing. When discourse becomes writing, distancing begins. With the factor distancing, the horizon of the text expands, and the nature of the world in front of the text changes.

The term "world"... has the meaning that we all understand when we say of the newborn child that he has come into the world. For me, the world is the ensemble of references opened up by every kind of text, descriptive or poetic, that I have read, understood and loved. And to understand a text is to interpolate among the predicates of our situation all the significations that make a "welt" out of our "umwelt." It is this enlarging of our horizon of existence that permits us to speak of the references opened up by the text or of the world opened up by the referential claims of most texts.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 37.

The task of understanding, then, has little to do with the author and his life situation.

It seeks to grasp the world-propositions opened up by the reference of the text. To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference: from what it says, to what it talks about.⁶⁰

Ricoeur thus opens a new possibility for the contemporaneity of a text. The sense of the text is continually being born into a new world, opening up new possibilities for the reader. The text is open to an understanding from the vantage point of its new horizon.

Metaphor. Even as brief a discussion of Ricoeur as this study permits would be incomplete without touching the area of metaphor. He has written so extensively on the subject that only the briefest sketch is possible. Ricoeur moves sharply away from the classic presuppositions of metaphor, citing the work of I. A. Richards as a springboard for his proposals. I summarize Ricoeur:

1) The first new development is the discovery of a semantic approach to metaphor, with the metaphor having most to do with the semantics of the sentence. We should speak of the metaphorical utterance, with the metaphor resulting from the tension between two terms in the utterance.

2) The metaphor is not really a tension between two terms in an utterance, but between two opposed interpretations of the utterance. A metaphor exists and is sustained in and through interpretation.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

3) At stake in a metaphorical utterance is the appearance of kinship where ordinary vision does not perceive any relationship, thus opening new possibility for meaning.

4) A live metaphor occurs when the tension between interpretations elicits a veritable creation of meaning. Live metaphors are metaphors of invention, where the tension, the discordance leads to new extension of meaning.⁶¹

Ricoeur draws two conclusions, saying,

Real metaphors are not translatable... because they create their meaning... and... a metaphor is not an ornament of discourse. It has more than an emotive value because it offers new information. A metaphor, in short, tells us something new about reality.⁶²

The hermeneutical thinking of Ricoeur offers real promise in the realm of biblical interpretation. Free from the strictures of a rigid historicism, the inevitable process of distancing need not be only problematical, but rather may provide new opportunities for modes of being in the world for texts. A new understanding of metaphor, creative and inventive, opens new vistas for the word becoming a living word in the context of the contemporary interpreter.

CONCLUSION

My quest for a practical hermeneutic began with four preconditions, and it is appropriate to pull together threads from the Liberation Theologians, David Tracy and Paul Ricoeur in response.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 45-53.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 53-54.

The Liberation Theologians are most sensitive to the matter of context as the arena of praxis. They also approach it in the most wholistic sense, excluding no aspect of life experience from the process of the hermeneutical circle. David Tracy acknowledges the omission of a critical social theory. The absence of a sense of urgency in this area reflects that the contextual experience of David Tracy is the university, while that of the Liberation Theologian is one of oppression. Ricoeur does not look directly at this concern, but suggests indirectly, if I understand correctly, that the "world" in front of the text is an inclusive world, and that the text is free to engage any and all participants in a dialectic.

What bears ultimate significance, in a hermeneutical sense, is that the text is free to engage or be engaged in the context which I experience. While its engagement in previous contexts, historically speaking, may be instructive, the possibility of the word becoming event in my context is charged with hope.

A considerable amount of negative reaction has resulted from the openness of Latin theologians to dialogue with Marxism, a dialogue carried on as well in other theological circles. The larger issue is one of whether there are spheres where dialogue is forbidden, or whether the biblical witness is brought to bear on the whole of the human community. Is it a message for an exclusive "Christian" community, or does it speak to the human condition? My

conviction is that the Liberationists, David Tracy, and Paul Ricoeur would all encourage that wider dialogue, embracing the human community in its enormous diversity.

The inventive and creative metaphor of Paul Ricoeur is so significant for the Liberation Theologians, for David Tracy and for me, in opening the door to new and exciting Scriptural interpretations. This creative and inventive edge can also evoke Scripture as testimony with a voice that can be taken seriously in the context of the biblical interpreter. The possibility and probability of hitting the ball rather than the fungus is immeasurably heightened.

Finally, the "ball" emerges from the seedbed of the dialectic of text and context and the metaphors which are alive there. The engagement of text and context, in effect, becomes the primary seedbed for sharply focused seminal ideas for the preacher. The "ball" is none other than those depth issues, questions and concerns which emerge from the dialectic and are the real seminal stuff for effective preaching. Preaching which chooses to wrestle with anything less in terms of substance or depth of ultimate concern may be nice preaching, but can scarcely be called effective preaching.

Chapter 3

JESUS REVISITED

"From that time Jesus began to preach..." Matthew 4:17¹

For a season or two the image of Frederick Buechner... of life as journey, and particularly as "sacred journey," has provided a new way to look at life itself.² Perhaps more than ever before, I have become conscious of the journey and the process of accumulation which goes with the journey. The very nature of this preacher is to accumulate data, experience, interpretative images... and then look for synthesis and mutuality.

The makings of this chapter are bound up in the search for synthesis and mutuality among a group of ideas, interests and experiences. In a suggestive kind of way, I believe they come to some intersection in the life and particularly in the preaching of Jesus. It is the preaching of Jesus which pulls together a previous concern with Liberation Theology and another interest in creativity and the creative process. Combined, they form a trilogy which begins to bring focus to a new question or perhaps questions.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the creative geneses of Jesus, attempting to get down under his preaching

¹All scripture quoted is RSV.

²Frederick Buechner, The Sacred Journey (New York: Harper & Row, 1982) p. 6.

and teaching to the questions of how and what. What made Jesus a creative preacher? How did he produce his content? What factors in his life, learning and living lifted him head and shoulders above the religious leaders of his time and all time?

Researching Jesus as a preacher has proven to be no easy task. The resources which focus on Jesus as a preacher are extremely limited. So much has been and is being done with the written texts which emerge from his preaching, but the arena behind those texts seems to be only slightly touched.

The scope of this chapter prohibits the kind of detailed exegetical work which might be called forth by the questions which emerge. I intend rather to be suggestive and explorative, to perhaps open up the possibility of a more extensive development in the future.

Assumptions

Four basic assumptions help to define the task and set some limits on the scope of this chapter:

1) Jesus was the most creative preacher, the master preacher. A. R. Bond, writing about 75 years ago, says it well,

Jesus of Nazareth was the world's Master Preacher. His ministry was brief but epochal. Through his own custom and his direction for the later ministry of the Apostles, Jesus created the Christian pulpit. His preaching was cast in the Oriental, Hebrew forms and was delivered to audiences varied in size from the single listener

to the vast multitude. His personality, message and method drew attention from all classes of people. His success as a preacher should be measured both by his personal mastery of his audiences and by his creation of the ideals that have controlled the homiletical methods in all ages.³

2) Spiritualizing the creative geneses of Jesus is an inadequate interpretative method. This temptation, which may explain the lack of materials on the subject, is to simply assign the creativity of Jesus to his divinity. While this sounds nice and rings with sweet piety, it fails to take seriously Jesus as a man and ignores the creative potentials of all men and women.

3) The Biblical Witness has a basic authenticity and integrity. Making this assumption does not indicate a kind of blind literalism on my part, but rather acknowledges that there simply isn't time and space here to enter into those issues.

I find myself deeply indebted to people like Dominic Crossan, James Breech, Dan Via and Norman Perrin, who have done such excellent work in attempting to get at the original stories, the original preaching of Jesus. If I were to pursue the exegetical questions which emerge from the suggestive material in this chapter, several extensive book-length pieces could emerge.

4) The content of this chapter is intended to be explorative rather than comprehensive. There is potential in the scope of this writing for several major papers,

³ Albert Richard Bond, The Master Preacher: A Study of the Homiletics of Jesus (New York: American Tract Society, 1910) p. 13.

perhaps a thesis. While it might be tempting to do such an expansive work, time and energy limitations suggest a more sane and limited approach.

Proposals

With these assumptions as guidelines, I want to make three proposals, proposals which I suggest begin to get down under to the methodological roots of Jesus, the creative master preacher.

1) Jesus operated from the perspective of a radical new hermeneutic.

2) The life style of Jesus, the way he related to people, politics and environment provided the creative seedbed for his preaching.

3) He used intentional creative process in discovering and relating his material and ideas.

THE HERMENEUTIC OF JESUS

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Matthew 5:17-19.

...the crowds were astonished at his teaching for he taught as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. Matthew 7:28-29.

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Matthew 9:14.

Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 16:6.

For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives... I say to you; whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery. Matthew 19:8-9.

Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath? Mark 2:24.

The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. Mark 3:27.

And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke well of him... Luke 2:21-22.

No man ever spoke like this man! John 6:47.

The pages of the Gospels reflect Jesus, his life, teaching and preaching. They also reflect, in the process, a hermeneutic at work. If we measure the responses of the people, the hermeneutic which he used moved in new and different directions. He gave fresh and unexpected interpretations to the Scripture, interpretations which often surprised and confronted his listeners.

My preference in Biblical-theological method would be to draw conclusions on the hermeneutics of Jesus by direct study of the texts. An alternative route, however, is to reflect on the biblical witness in dialogue with an existing model for doing hermeneutics.

The model, sketched in Chapter 1, by Juan Luis Segundo, provides a basis for dialogue.⁴

⁴Juan Luis Segundo, Liberation of Theology, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976) pp. 8-9.

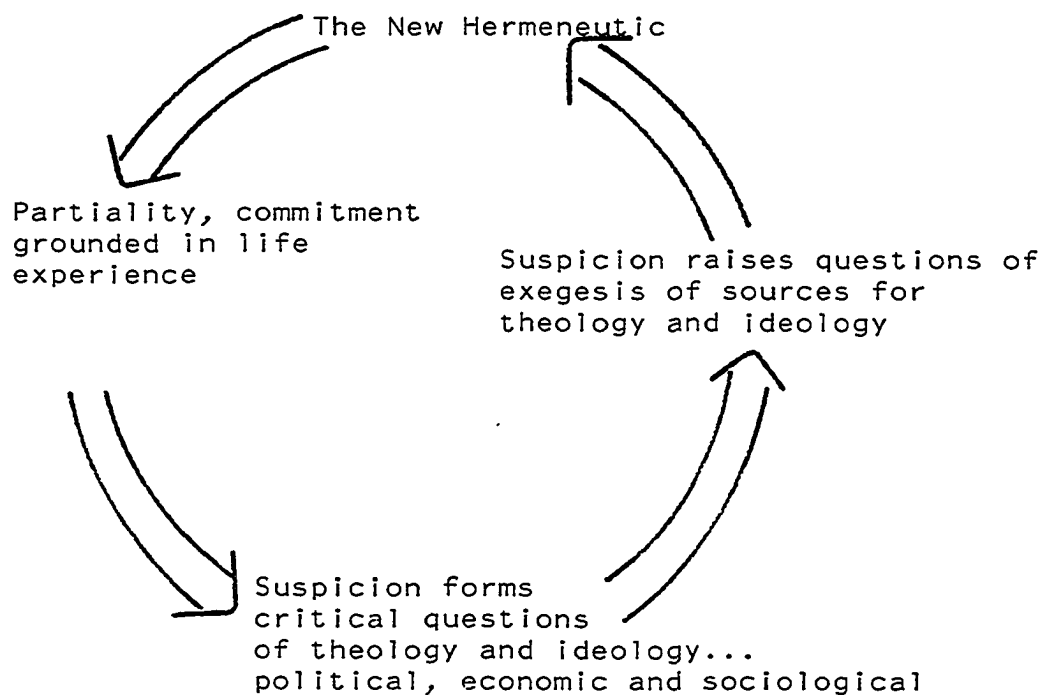


Fig. 2 The Hermeneutical Circle of Juan Luis Segundo

The starting point for Segundo in doing hermeneutics is the peculiar and particular situation in which he experiences life. It is not to be understood as just a particular perspective or way of looking at life, but is rather grounded in real life experience.

In this same sense, one can speak of a similar starting point for Jesus in doing hermeneutics. The reader of the Gospels comes away with a distinct impression that Jesus experiences life, whether it is in the dust of the roadway, the wine textured hilarity of a wedding feast,

the agony of Gethsemane, or the nails of a crucifixion cross.

The hermeneutics of Segundo and other Liberationists has sometimes been labelled as a "hermeneutics of suspicion." This theme is revealed in the second stage of the circle, where he addresses critical questions to theology and ideology. Segundo argues that nothing less than suspicion will break through the systematic rationale which sustains the system. He concludes that every hermeneutic is partisan, "even when it believes itself to be neutral and tries to act in that way."⁵

Even the casual reader of the Gospels will encounter there the building conflict, the tension between Jesus and the political-theological leadership of the high priests and the various parties, notably the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians. The conflict, the tension, is considerable evidence to suggest that Jesus was in word and deed shaping some critical questions which struck at the roots of their ideological and theological systems.

A suspicious approach to the theological and ideological roots of society leads to a similar suspicion of the exegetical and interpretative foundations of the status quo theology and ideology.

The passion narratives of the Gospels reveal the over-riding concern of the political-theological leadership to sustain the status quo. Surely it was better for one man to die than to have the system disrupted.

⁵Ibid., p. 25.

I would suggest that this fear was so passionate because Jesus challenged them at the source, their exegetical work with the Scriptures. The evidence does suggest that the focus of exegetical work for the political-theological leadership was to sustain and defend the status quo.

Segundo moves finally to a new hermeneutic, a new way of looking at and interpreting the Biblical Witness. He concedes that the route of suspicion may lead some to give up on Scripture as a source, but suggests that may also encourage a new look, free from the dominating interpretative stances inherited from former positions.⁶

James Cone interprets the new hermeneutic as the point where Scripture becomes event,⁷ introducing a term which helps us to understand the hermeneutics of Jesus. Clearly, Jesus broke out of a prevailing hermeneutic which had turned the Biblical Witness into a dead letter. In a very real sense, in his person and in his preaching, Scripture once again became event. He declined to trivalize Scripture by using it to sustain a system. Instead, he gave it authority by allowing it to challenge life styles, values and systems.

Such an approach would certainly be refreshing good news to a disenfranchised populace... but it would come

⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

⁷ James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970) p. 64.

as a serious threat to those whose life style, values and system it confronted.

LIFE STYLE

And preach as you go, saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand... take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff... Matthew 10:7-10.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth, I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. Matthew 10:34.

It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave;... Matthew 20:26-27.

Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Mark 2:16.

Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Luke 9:58.

...for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Luke 12:15.

...Lord, do you wash my feet? John 13:6.

Hermeneutics was undoubtedly a major factor in the creative genius of Jesus, but it was not the only factor. Current studies demonstrate that there are life style factors which contribute to creative activity.⁸ The results of such studies suggest taking a look at the life style

⁸Sidney J. Parnes, Creative Behaviour Guidebook (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967).

of Jesus and how that contributed to his emergence as the master preacher.

Sidney J. Parnes speaks of "blocks" to creative activity and removal of "brakes" in developing a creative climate.⁹ He clearly suggests that one can build, encourage or modify a life style more or less conducive to creative output.

The New Testament suggests, at least two possible aspects of a creative life style. The first might be well described as a detachment from systems, structures, and property. Jesus apparently lived with few, if any, possessions, maintained few family and community ties, and felt restricted by few, if any, social inhibitions. While some of the biblical passages sound almost harsh to our ears, I suggest that they reflect a conscious effort to maintain the freedom of a chosen detachment.

The second aspect is more complex, not as obvious in the Gospels, and also in need of a model to give it some clarity. George T. Locke Land is the source of this model. It provides a tool for reflection on characteristics of growth and development in persons, institutions and societies.¹⁰

¹⁰George T. Locke Land, Grow or Die: The Unifying Principle of Transformation (New York: Dell, 1973) pp. 11-12.

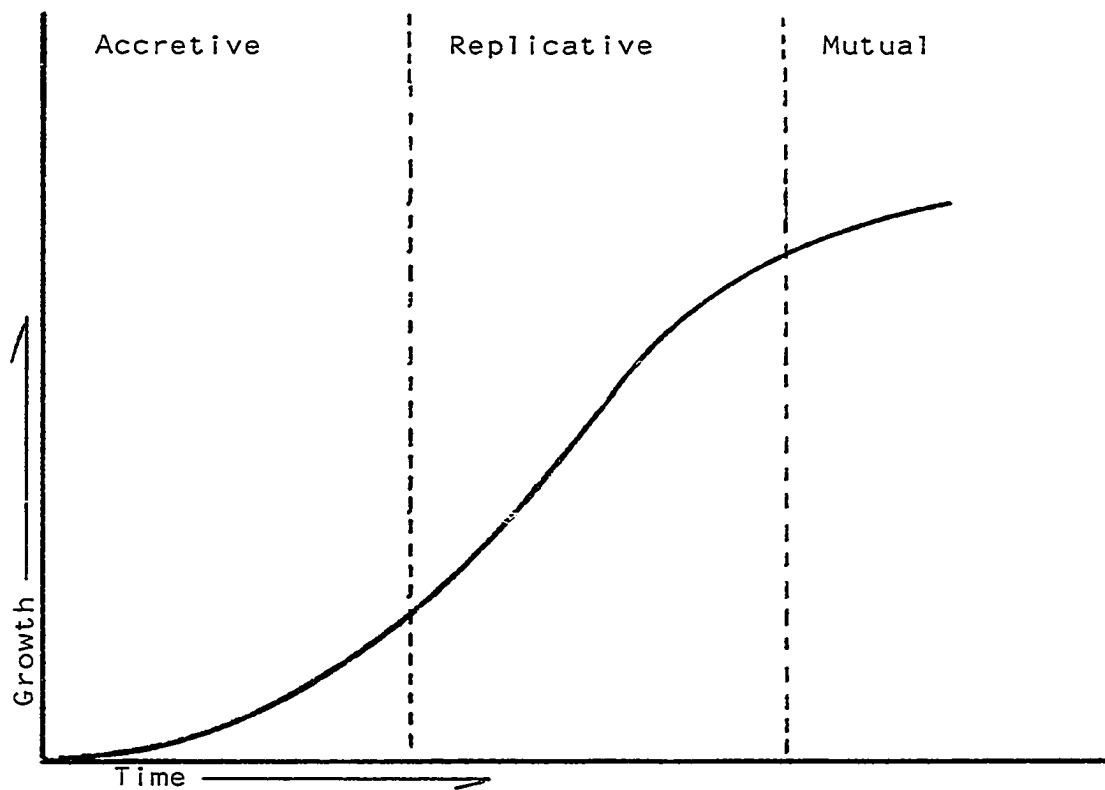


Fig. 3 Growth and Development Model of G.T.L. Land

In defining the terms of the model, George Land speaks of accretive behavior as getting and enlarging sameness, without changing forms. This is evidenced in early childhood behavior by grabbing and possessing.

Replicative behavior grows by influencing others to take on the form of the initiator. Children, as they grow older, are taught to be like the parent and in adolescence, seek to be like their peers.

Mutual behavior is very different, for it speaks of reciprocal interaction. In parent-child relationships,

it is when we learn as much from our children as they learn from us.¹¹

He further defines his terms:

These growth forms of accretion, replication, and mutualism correspond to a great extent to the ancient Greek behavioral description of Eros, Philia, and Agape. Eros, or accretive growth, is the existence of nothing but the "I," Philia recognizes the existence of another and "outside" I as a replication, and Agape is seen as a total sharing of love, the "we." In more modern terms, we can see that all of the fragmentary theories of psychology easily fit into the various patterns and manifestations of growth. Drives and compulsions for such things as power, possession, and dominance, as well as the lower biological urges, are ones of self-expansion through production of offspring, emphasis on sex, and so forth; thus they are accretive in their nature. Needs for manipulation, as well as being manipulated--dependent and counterdependent modes of behavior--are basically replicative. Mutualistic patterns are found in empathic and creative behavior--drives for self-fulfillment and self-actualization.¹²

George Land draws a more extensive definition of mutual behavior:

The "healthy" mutualistic person can be characterized by an empathic, give and take, creative attitude. He is interested in his environment, deeply involved in his outputs and work, innovative in his contributions, deep and open in his relationships with other persons, and derives not only satisfaction but joy in many experiences in life. He feels that he is a "natural" for the kind of work he is doing and will often sacrifice immediate pleasure and, at times, would even risk his own survival to achieve what he feels is a contribution to a greater cause or organism. There is little separation between him and his environment, for he both absorbs it and projects himself into it. The characteristic of mutuality is evident in his consideration of the things and people about him, and his ability to respond in kind and mutuality to any kind of behavior. He listens to other people and is willing to be affected by them as well as

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., pp. 114-115.

having effect on them, at their own level of growth. When frustrated by circumstances, he turns problems into opportunities and challenges, and the result is heightened input and output. He loves both himself and others.¹³

One of the particular aspects of mutual behavior which George Land did not include in the previous definitions is synthesis, reflected in a capacity to put new information together with old, high recall of data, ideas, imagination, and good empathetic judgement.¹⁴

In so many ways George Land describes Jesus! Jesus, the master preacher, lives his relationships in a mutual style, from washing feet to weeping over the death of Lazarus. He has the capacity to love himself and others. He is able to change roles from Lord to servant, mix sinners with saints, and call a group of disciples representing an incredibly diverse mix of personalities.

The mutual style of Jesus threatened people who found their identity in accretive and replicative behavior. This, too, upset their status quo.

Mutual, synthetic behavior is creative behavior, providing a seedbed for ideas and new combinations of old ideas to be formulated. It is achieved by few who invest their lives in possessions or social systems. A detached life style is thus an essential component of mutual behavior. Detachment and mutual behavior are bound together.

All three kinds of behavior are reflected in the lives of most people, and are similarly reflected in systems and societies. Systems and societies grow and change much

¹³ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

more slowly, however, lagging behind those who emerge as creative leadership.

The tension between Jesus and the political-theological leadership is an obvious result of the gap between them on the curve. That gap served to give further creative impetus to Jesus, but of course, also led to his death.

PREPARATION AND PROCESS

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and man. Luke 2:52.

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Matthew 14:23.

And Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea... Mark 3:7.

And he went up into the hills... Mark 3:13.

And when he had taken leave of them he went into the hills to pray. Mark 6:47.

And when it was day he departed and went into a lonely place. Luke 4:42.

But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed. Luke 5:16.

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. Luke 9:28.

Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself. John 6:25.

The library may suffer from a paucity of material on Jesus as a preacher, but the New Testament even more completely ignores the entire preparation phase of Jesus'

life. We are left with the task of reading between the lines and drawing conclusions from inference.

We are able to conclude that he was able to read Hebrew and speak in the synagogues. A familiarity with Aramaic is revealed in Aramaic words which creep into the text. Because Greek was used as the vernacular of the civilized world, he surely was familiar with it as well.

Josephus writes of education as a "chief ambition" for the children, suggesting that Jewish families of that era placed great emphasis on training their children.¹⁵ Such education probably took place in the synagogue, with the Old Testament as its major resource. The ability of Jesus to converse and debate with the well-educated people of his time suggests study on a broader base, including "the exegetical methods and terminology of the rabbinical schools."¹⁶ The apocalyptic nature of portions of his teaching also suggests familiarity with a broad range of inter-testamental apocalyptic literature... which would not have been part of a basic synagogue school program.

I am convinced that Jesus knew his Biblical and theological heritage as well as anyone of his time, and was conversant in the current political, social and cultural issues of his time.

While a significant educational background can be inferred from New Testament evidence, it is also apparent that he learned a great deal because he was a careful and

¹⁵Francis J. Handy, Jesus The Preacher (New York, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949) p. 43.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 37.

sensitive observer of people and events. He demonstrates great insight, intuitive insight, into the very depths of people, and never seems to be ignorant of the political winds. We should not, in haste, assign these characteristics to an all-knowing God, failing to recognize the gifts and skills of Jesus.

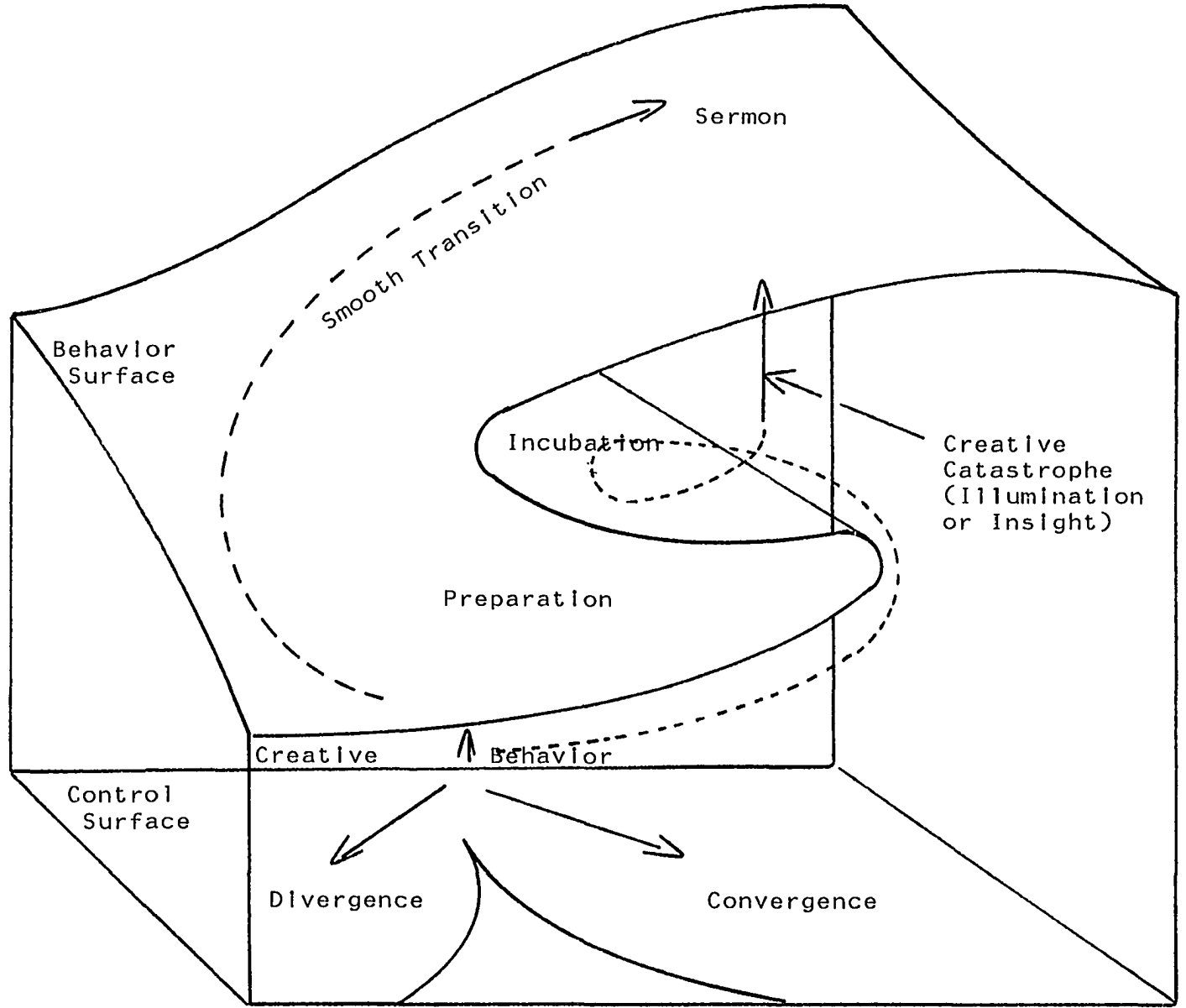
The larger questions which I want to look at, however, is how Jesus uses his knowledge in process and preparation for the task of teaching and preaching. How does he work from good basic preparation and knowledge to insightful and exciting proclamation?

Several years ago I discovered, as a participant in a seminar, a model for creative process which has since clarified sermon creation for my own work.¹⁷ I also find it helpful in discussing the creative activity of Jesus.

This model serves to illuminate a number of aspects of creative behavior. At the base of the model is an illustrated tension between convergence and divergence, resulting in creative behavior. The tension is built, however, by accumulative preparation, including all education and experience, from the extremes of convergence and divergence. A significant aspect of the tension, for preaching, is the dialectic of text and context in the hermeneutical circle. I would suggest that even celestial visions depend on some basic preparation to provide resource and substance.

¹⁷ See Fig. 4 next page. Source: Robin G. King, "The Dynamics of Creative Process: A Catastrophic Approach" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, York University, 1979).

Fig. 4 Creative Catastrophe Model of Robin King



The model illustrates two potential routes from preparation to sermon or preaching. A dashed line demonstrates a smooth transition, using systematic, largely right brain, head orientated process. (Methodology of this sort is the basis of much seminary homiletical training.) It is effective, solid, reliable... it gets the job done, but the results may be unimaginative and rather mechanical.

The alternate route, illustrated with a dotted line, is through incubation to creative catastrophe. (Illumination or insight.) This route is less predictable, responds to pressure, depends more heavily on unconscious or sub-conscious activity, and is usually more imaginative and insightful.

Preliminary reflection on the life and ministry of Jesus suggests that creative catastrophe is a way to interpret his creative process. Insight, unpredictability, illumination, brilliance under pressure... all are revealed in his ministry and preaching. The most significant evidence of a conscious use of such a process is found in his use of incubation. Other terms, such as meditation, reflection and prayer may be substituted, but the process is the same.

Jesus used time, either alone or with a very few close friends, to prepare for his ongoing ministry. The passages previously quoted illustrate this methodology directly... and other accounts such as the Temptation and

the Garden of Gethsemane all could be subject to such an interpretation.

We might dismiss these references as instances where Jesus simply wanted to escape the press of the crowd, which he often found necessary. But it was also essential to the development of his teaching and preaching and a key resource for the creative energy of his life, energy which his teaching and preaching reflected.

CONCLUSION

Where does all of the speculation and the exploration lead? It certainly leads to few conclusions at this time. A great deal of further study and research is needed to shed the kind of light on the whole matter which might justify bold and exciting conclusions.

There are a few things, however, which I would venture to say, though they are less conclusive than suggestive.

First, I am convinced that we have obscured a whole aspect of the life of Jesus through nearly two thousand years of church history. Certainly the overwhelming tendency to spiritualize the gifts and skills, the genius of Jesus, has been a major factor here. In addition, the early church rapidly made a switch from seeking its power and motivation from the source where Jesus sought it, to the words of Jesus and the written pages of the forming New Testament Canon. Those sources were much more concrete and predictable.

and therefore suitable to the building of the kingdom in institutional forms.

Secondly, we ought to be more careful about naming Jesus as the master preacher on the basis of the rhetoric, the stories and parables, the miracles and other surface evidence on the pages of the New Testament. So much of what Jesus works with is the stuff and style of the Rabbinical schools and the Hebrew approach to doing theology. They simply did not do, and do not do now, systematic theology as we think of it. Their vehicle was the story, the sayings and figures, not unlike what we find on the lips of Jesus. Certainly the genius of Jesus goes down under to a radical kind of freedom, a radical kind of mutuality and synthetic thinking which is creativity at its very best.

Thirdly, taking the methodology of Jesus seriously is highly suggestive of methodology for the modern preacher. Perhaps we should take our hermeneutics both more and less seriously, to find some freedom which might allow the Gospel to become event. All of us who have the audacity to venture into a pulpit find ourselves in ruts that confine, restrict, and dull the edge of the word we attempt to give flesh and life to. Surely we could discover and use hermeneutical method which would kick us from those ruts into some fresh air and ideas.

If the life style of Jesus is a key factor in the creative genius of his preaching, should we not examine

again the life styles which we lead? Do we fail to take such a question seriously because we reject the answer as too great a price to pay? Certainly some detachment could help us be free to create and free to preach. If we ever risked some radical mutualistic and synthetic behavior it might get us killed or cost us our jobs... but the possibility is also there that we might create some exciting new relationships and generate some ideas that would turn the modern world on its theological ear.

We have all heard the guilt-inducing demands that we should spend time in meditation and prayer. I know of few preachers who do not crave this time, but also find it very difficult to put aside and to use with liberality. I find it exciting to suggest that using such time, however, is to reach into the same source of creativity that Jesus used and attempted to teach us to use.

Chapter 4

PREACHER AND PREACHING: ARTIST AND ART FORM

Back in the days when hardcover books sold for five dollars and the war in Vietnam was running down, I discovered a book by John Killinger... and in that book a working definition of a preacher.

The preacher... is a man, a sensitive, creative, poetic figure, grappling with the problems of being human and secular and whole in our time, and sharing both the quest and its results with other individuals around him. This is finally the only justification for his being paid a salary to be a minister. He is freed from the demands of a nine-to-five position in order to circulate among the persons of the congregation, to ask questions about their living, their style of existence, to reflect on them and the sum of knowledge he has acquired and is still in the process of acquiring from books, teachers, and other resources, to share the results of this process, and then to work with them to correct his own interpretation of the results. He is their freed man, in other words, their freed mind, their freed heart, their freed conscience, their freed dreamer, their freed critic, their freed believer.¹

It seemed to me then, and it seems to me now, that Killinger was attempting to say something very significant about what it meant for me to be a preacher. Years of reflection on what is in his definition leads me to suggest that what he was saying, though he never expresses it so directly, is that the preacher is an artist, and that preaching is a unique form of art.

The proposal, that preachers are artists and preaching is an art form, which Killinger suggested to me, is

¹John Killinger, Leave It To The Spirit (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) pp. 156-157.

the basic concern of this chapter.

The attempt to research the proposal, however, has not proven to be a very fruitful enterprise. Very little material in this direction has been written in the field of theology and preaching, and preaching has not been considered an art form from the realm of art theory and philosophy.

I believe, however, that it is possible to begin to speak of the preacher as artist and preaching as an art form. To do so, we must begin to employ the kind of language which might be used in discussing the work of other artists and other art forms, language which might apply to Rembrandt, to Robert Frost, or to Beethoven. We must begin by assuming that there are experiences and categories common to the various art forms which could be found common to the art of the preacher.

To do so also means that preachers and preaching must be exposed to the scrutiny of a larger critical audience... and I have something of a suspicion that the reluctance of preachers to expose themselves in this way has diminished the quality of preaching and inhibited the possibility of preaching being perceived as art.

In attempting to shed some light on this proposal, I want to begin by looking at some of the suggestive sources from the realm of preaching and theology. John Killinger introduced the question, but a number of voices emerge from the preaching literature.

Sussane Langer will be the source for input from the broader field of Art Theory. She provides definitions and categories which are comprehensive enough to give some substance to our inquiry.

The end of the chapter will attempt to pull together some of the threads of Langer and the material from the preaching literature... and in so doing to challenge preachers to a new self-understanding as artists.

RUMINATING

Through the years since the notion of the preacher as artist and preaching as art placed itself on my personal agenda, I have looked for material which consciously linked together art and the task of preaching. It is no problem whatsoever to discover titles and books, and chapters within books, which discuss at great length the "art of preaching." But with very few exceptions, the focus of these intriguing titles rests on the craftsmanship of the exegete, the skill of the outliner and writer, or the expertise in the use of rhetoric in the pulpit. Few attempt to probe behind the craftsmanship to the artist or the work of art, the preaching event.

Sources: Preaching and Theology

Early in the quest, I discovered the work of Charles L. Rice, Interpretation And Imagination. The major focus of this work is to push the reader (preacher) to use the words of artists, in particular the writers of contemporary

literature, imaginatively in their preaching. Rice comes very close to calling the preacher an artist, stating, "that the preacher's vocation is translation, the apt and artful presentation of the Gospel in contemporary idiom."² He stops short of such a statement, however, preferring to see the artist as a resource for the preacher.

Rice identifies a kind of double thrust value in the artist for the preacher. He begins by identifying the problem of communicating with people who by their secularity are closed to the traditional voice of the church. At this point Rice suggests:

Enter the artist. At his best genuinely secular, he is usually the social critic, leading his heroes and heroines out of the flat Midwest, Puritan New England, the decaying South, the nouveau West, the American cocktail party. He knows (and that is the reason for his being an artist) that human being, to say nothing of God, can be identified with no province.³

It becomes apparent, at this juncture, that Rice has ruled out the possibility; that the preacher could also be secular in this same sense; that he could know in the same dimension which Rice so easily ascribes to the artist, or that he could be deeply aware of how God cannot be identified with any one province. Instead, he continues by suggesting,

That the preacher... may find in the artist that cultural detachment and enlargement of mind which will inject a prophetic critique of culture into his preaching. It is certain that the likelihood of prophetic preaching increases in proportion to the preacher's learning to sit loose to

²Charles L. Rice, Ministry and Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970) p. XI.

³Ibid., p. 31.

social consensus while being as concerned as the artist for the quality of human life.

The artist is prophetic because he is catholic... it is the artist's very humanity, the fact that his medium is human experience, which makes him catholic. To see the artist as catholic is to recognize the religious nature of literature as expressing ultimate human concerns.⁴

However accurate Rice may be in his perception of the artist as both prophetic and catholic, I am surprised by his implication that only by using the artist does the preacher have access to being prophetic and catholic. Certainly an Isaiah or Jeremiah would be a bit shocked by the suggestions of Rice.

The second part of Rice's double thrust emerges in a discussion of "the artist as religious."⁵ He speaks of the long-standing relationship between religion and art. Rice again reveals his preference for the artist, saying,

There is in art the dimension of transcendence, or to be more contemporary, depth. Daniel Marsh, writing about creative preaching, says: 'The function of art is always the same, in whatever realm it operates, to teach us to see; to teach us what to see; to teach us to see more than we see.'⁶

This same vein of thought continues... and all the while Rice comes so tantalizingly close to what he seems unable to say. "What is essential to art is that one comes to see, to see himself and his experience in a new way,"⁷ is such a great opening, but Rice follows it saying, "the artist as midwife to self-understanding

⁴Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁶Ibid., p. 36.

⁵Ibid., p. 35.

⁷Ibid., p. 44.

has much to teach the preacher..."⁸ He continues,

Preaching too often caters to the uptight, to persons who are aware only of what they 'are always saying.' Art, on the other hand, leads to such recognition as accords with Jesus' description of the Kingdom as a treasure, or a pearl,... The preacher, like the artist, has the vocation of unearthing treasure by opening eyes.⁹

Adding to what he almost says, Rice affirms that, "the sermon effects a new kind of seeing."¹⁰ But he continually falls short of suggesting that the preacher is an artist. However strongly the implication comes through that the preacher should be like the artist, Rice resists moving from analogy to naming the preacher artist and endowing him with the same gifts and tasks.

A much older piece of writing is a second major suggestive resource. The Christian Century recently celebrated its centennial... no small feat for a religious journal. In the process, they reprinted a variety of materials from the past, among which was an article, an editorial piece, originally unsigned but known to be from the pen of W. E. Garrison, of the University of Chicago. The editorial was published in 1924 and was entitled, "Religion As Art."¹¹

Garrison, writing in a style and with a sharpness that belies the intervening years, discusses the need for art to express what cannot be directly or categorically

⁸Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁹Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹W. E. Garrison, "Religion As Art," Christian Century 101: 10 (March 1984) 308. A reprint of an editorial originally published in 1924.

expressed. He reaches the central thrust of the article when he says,

It is the primary business of art not to give pleasure but to express the highest spiritual reality. If some literally minded person asks exactly what spiritual reality is expressed by some particular work of art... there is no answer which will satisfy him in the terms in which he desires it; for if the work of art has any justification at all, it is that it gives expression to something which cannot be otherwise expressed. Even strictly religious truth, in the technical sense, cannot be literally expressed.¹²

To Garrison I want to respond with a modification of Rice to say; enter the preacher! Garrison, whose concern lies elsewhere than in preaching, doesn't go on to build such connections. But he does make a most interesting observation with great potential for the preacher and the issue at hand.

Man achieves personality by differentiation in the pursuit of higher interests, and art is the sincere individual expression by which man rises to complete personality. He achieves sainthood not by rule but by a unique and creative art, the medium of which is conduct and ideals. These are the most interesting and plastic materials in which a work of art can be created.¹³

Garrison concludes the article with a discussion of God as artist and the suggestions that, "Man has no higher privilege than that of being, like him, an artist both appreciative and creative."¹⁴

Again we have a writer coming close but falling short of naming the preacher an artist and preaching an art. But Garrison does open the door to the possibility

¹²Ibid., p. 307.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 308.

¹³Ibid.

of both. The saint is an artist in personality rather than in preaching, but that need not be so far removed. The quality, credibility and power of the preaching event are not separable from the person of the preacher. The categories which Garrison uses, are also very much in anticipation of what Langer uses a generation later.

Anyone who has wrestled seriously with the task of expressing religious or spiritual truth, from a stance other than rigid fundamentalism, knows how it defies literal expression and cries out instead for the more abstract expressive methods of the creative artist.

A third suggestive resource does take the step which both Rice and Garrison are reluctant or unable to take. Willard F. Jabusch, professor of Preaching at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, Mundelein, Illinois, comes out of the closet to talk about "The Preacher As Artist."¹⁵

We preachers have been reluctant to think of ourselves as poets and artists. As theologians, yes. As exegetes, psychologists, counselors, communicators, persuaders, rhetoricians, pastors, yes! But to be an artist, a poet, sounds too extraordinary, demanding special gifts beyond us. And yet the sermon, like art itself, must be 'the revealing experience.'

We have been entrusted with the word. We become artists with language.¹⁶

Jabusch continues his discussion with a provocative sketch of an artist from the work of Luis Alonso Schokel.

Usually he is a man possessing a capacity to experience many things intensely. These

¹⁵Willard F. Jabusch, The Person In the Pulpit (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980) p. 78.

¹⁶Ibid.

experiences need not be specifically poetic; much of what he lives is shared by the lot of men... He is capable of deeply personal experiences and at the same time, by reason of some mysterious sympathy with men and things, he can enter into the experience of others and relive them... In art, a man gives himself up to his experiences, admitting all their vividness and their pain... However, a man must be somewhat detached from an experience, be it his own or another's if he is to write of it. A great artist begins with an intuition which forms the dominant life center and unifying principle of his work... Finally, the literary artist has the gift of language.¹⁷

While Jabusch does not develop further his argument, or suggest further resources, it is most interesting to hear this breakthrough coming from a Catholic Priest, from an environment where preaching has had such a low profile. Conversely, it does come from an environment where art has maintained a rather strong role in the religious experience. It scarcely needs to be noted that the protestant tradition has by and large ignored the power of art in the whole religious experience.

One of the most recent voices in the field of preaching literature, Elizabeth Achtemeier, comes as close as anyone to the vision of Willard Jabusch, as she discusses the question of what constitutes the difference between an ordinary speech and an artistic creation.

Surely the answer is that art allows the one seeing or hearing it to enter into a new experience. A painter puts color on canvas in such a way that his viewers are enabled to see what he sees and to participate in reality in a new way. A poet arranges words in such a manner that

¹⁷Luis Alonso Schokel, The Inspired Word (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965) p. 186.

they convey to their hearers a new look at the world... the words become transparent to a new perception of reality. So too in the art of preaching: the English language is framed in such a way that the congregation is allowed to enter into a new experience... to exchange their old perceptions of themselves, their world, and God for new perceptions, to step outside an old manner of life and see the possibilities of a new one.¹⁸

At first glance, Achtemeier seems to be making a plea for strictly artistic use of the English language, but a further reading reveals her concern for hermeneutics and sound theological understanding going down under the use of language. She does take that step, however, of looking at preaching as art and the preacher as artist.

Sources: Art Theory

Alongside of these resources which come from the field of preaching and theology, I place the work of Susanne Langer.¹⁹ Her work deals comprehensively with art theory and provides a way to discuss art in broader terms. The categories of Langer may also enable us to push at the possibilities of understanding the preacher as an artist and preaching as art.

Susanne Langer develops a definition of art, starting from a tentative: "Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling."²⁰ She expands this tentative definition, or at least comes closer to explaining what she understands in the symbol:

¹⁸Elizabeth Achtemeier, Preaching As Theology And Art (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984) pp. 51-52.

¹⁹Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953)

²⁰Ibid., p. 40.

A work of art... is more than an 'arrangement' of given things... even qualitative things. Something emerges from the arrangement of tones and colors, which was not there before, and this, rather than the arranged material, is the symbol of sentence.²¹

Langer turns from the art at this point to the creative process.

The making of this expressive form is the creative process that enlists a man's utmost technical skill in the service of utmost conceptual power, imagination. Not the invention of new original turns, nor the adoption of novel themes, merits the word 'creative,' but the making of any work symbolic of feeling even in the most canonical context and manner.²²

From this expanded tentative definition Langer goes on to ask the question concerning "what is 'created' in a work of art?"²³ She suggests that what art expresses are not actual feelings but "ideas of feelings."²⁴ From here she moves to what I would understand her real working definition to be--that art creates an illusion of real feeling. Echoing a previous statement, she concludes,

The illusion, which constitutes the work of art, is not a mere arrangement of given materials in an aesthetically pleasing pattern; it is what results from the arrangement, and is literally something the artist makes, not something he finds... To produce and sustain the essential illusion... is the artist's task.²⁵

The creative process, or more precisely the craftsmanship task of producing art is defined by Langer as focusing around three principles; abstraction, plastic freedom and expressiveness.²⁶

²¹Ibid. ²²Ibid., p. 40-41. ²³Ibid., p. 46.

²⁴Ibid., p. 59. ²⁵Ibid., pp. 67-68. ²⁶Ibid., p. 60.

By abstraction Langer means that art must be estranged from actuality, having an "otherness," a "self-sufficiency," which frees it "from worldly office."²⁷ "Plastic freedom" is to be understood in terms of the manipulatable potential of the medium. Her concern is that the form "can be plastic, subject to deliberate torsion, modification, and composition for the sake of expressiveness."²⁸ Finally, expressiveness refers to a transparency which results when insight into reality guides the creating artist.²⁹

Langer concludes her discussion of the creative process by affirming that wherever these three principles are evident, craftsmanship is art.³⁰ These principles, together with her definition of art, provide some genuine material to the discussion of preaching as an art form. Langer, in her own language world, affirms the kind of statements used by Rice, Garrison, and Jabusch in their discussions of art and their leaning and leading statements which push at the question of art in the preacher's workshop.

RESPONSE

Ralph Milton, Canadian broadcaster and churchman, makes a significant plea in The Gift of Story:

It would be helpful if preachers could see sermons as an art form. Art is what happens to fine craftsmanship when it becomes more than the creator intended and communicates in ways that even the creator doesn't understand.³¹

²⁷Ibid., p. 59.

²⁸Ibid., p. 60.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ralph Milton, The Gift of Story (Winfield, B.C.: Wood Lake Press, 1982) p. 85.

Is it possible, out of the threads of Rice, Garrison, Jabusch and Langer, to respond to Milton's plea by saying, "yes, the sermon is an art form"... and "yes, the preacher is an artist?"

If we take the threefold criteria of Langer seriously, I believe we must confess that much preaching has been and is not art. The bulk of preaching falls by the wayside under the lights of the criteria of abstraction. In its push for literalism, exacting truth, dogmatic formulations of right and wrong, and wholesale adoption of biblical passages, much preaching is sifted out from the realms of art. This same literalism and rigid dogmatism violates Langer's call for plasticity and reflects either a narrow kind of scholarship or a lack of scholarship. A lack of creativity, which short-circuits subjecting the medium to torsion, modification or flexing to make it expressive also emerges from a literal and dogmatic approach. The intent of the preacher to do this kind of preaching precludes the sharing of insightful depth gained by the experiences of the preacher in his total life environment.

In utter contrast to this perhaps too sweeping a dismissal of the bulk of preaching as art, and preacher as artist, stands the preaching of Jesus. If we take the preaching of Jesus, as we might now understand it from the most recent New Testament scholarship, coming from the pens of people like Dominic Crossan, Norman Perrin, Dan Via and James Breech, and measure it with Langer

criteria, I suggest that it stands up incredibly well.

The parables of Jesus, for example, though long understood in literalistic terms, are now increasingly viewed as highly abstract works, with a true otherness and self-sufficiency which sets them free to be experienced and interpreted. The capacity of Jesus to work with the plasticity of the medium is reflected in the tension he creates, the freedom he exercises and masterful variations he employs to varied audiences and contexts. It is hardly necessary to suggest that Jesus was also extremely expressive, with an insight into reality that startled his audiences.

Echoing the words of Rice, the preaching of Jesus opened eyes and unearthed treasure. And it is consistent that those who preach Christ should also be in the business of opening eyes and unearthing treasure. Rice is inadequate, however, in suggesting that preachers should be like artists... Preachers should instead respond to the plea of Ralph Milton and say--yes, we are artists and our sermons are works of art.

Making such a bold statement, however, also requires subjecting both the creative process and the product to the scrutiny of standards from the broader world of art. If the art form is to have any integrity, it must be prepared to stand, in that larger arena, to be examined.

I am convinced that the preacher and preaching can stand in that arena of scrutiny. A whole new approach to the task of preaching may be required, a discovery afresh of the preaching of Jesus will be essential, and a new

openness to risk and failure in the process will need to be developed. As few other artists, the preacher must create on schedule with demands for enormous quantity of output each year. It follows that not all of the works of art created under such duress will be significant as art, but that does not negate the task or the goal. How many paintings of great artists have been sold only because of the fame of the artist? How many compositions of the great composers found their way only to a trash bin?

CONCLUSION

Conclusions, at the end of this type of conversation are rather illusive. The material is suggestive rather than conclusive. I do, however, want to make some observations which approach being guidelines for the would-be preacher-artist.

1) The initial awareness which emerges from the conversation is that the preacher is attempting to express something which is deeper and more profound than mere words and propositions. Something more than words and propositions must happen if that something is to be expressed.

2) The responsibility to get it said falls on the nature and the arrangement of the materials which creates an experience/event which goes beyond the capacity of the language itself. This serves to underline the great importance of engagement in the hermeneutical dialectic of text and context, and challenges the utmost creativity of the

preacher in digesting, reflecting and arranging in preparation for the actual preaching event itself.

3) The criteria of Susanne Langer of abstraction, plasticity, and expressiveness are suitable tools for evaluating the sermon which is nearly ready to preach. The nature of this evaluation is painful and honest criticism, which is prepared to examine the sermon for what it is.

4) The call to the preacher to be an artist is a call to greater discipline and finer craftsmanship, touched by a greater depth of spirituality. The temptation lurking under creativity and artistry is to somehow trust the Spirit to work by letting go and letting God. Letting go and letting God emerge, however, at the end of spiritual discipline rather than before. And the Spirit of God works above all where the richest kind of resources have been placed into the being of the preacher for the Spirit to work with. Finally, fine craftsmanship emerges only when lesser craftsmanship has been critically examined so that the process might be fine tuned through years of development and polish.

Chapter 5

MODEL BUILDING

The assignment, for a homiletics course, was to give an occasional sermon, a funeral sermon. After considerable reflection on the assignment, I determined to come to class without a sermon, opting instead to share with the class the process which I would use to create a sermon in the actual situation. The class was then given opportunity to critique the process, rather than the result of the process.

On that occasion, I argued that it was more important to critique the process, rather than the result, for if the process was correct, the possibility of a few sermons coming out right was much greater than if the preacher operated with faulty process. Faulty process was almost certainly doomed to produce poor quality sermons.

Fifteen years of regular preaching has illustrated the wisdom of that decision. For these fifteen years have involved a considerable amount of work in refining process for sermon development. And though there is no process which automatically leads to effective and artistic preaching, I am convinced that some processes lead nowhere, and some other processes open the doors to possibilities.

Working with the theory of art and the suggestive ideas from theology and preaching still leaves us short of an understanding of a process which might enable art

to happen in the sermon workshop and in the pulpit. My suspicion is that the process taught in seminaries is not designed to turn out artists and works of art, but rather reasonably safe copies preserving the eternal truths.

Model building, however, inevitably seems to lead in the preaching literature, to models cast in concrete, which become rigid and conducive to the production of copies rather than works of art. So the preacher needs to keep the wisdom of Langer in mind in the work of model building. Is it possible to build a working model which is abstract enough so that it is not locked into worldly offices, plastic enough so that it is can be freely manipulated for a full range of expression, and expressive enough to enable the insight of the preacher to be revealed and proclaimed?

In search of such a model, I would like to take the language we associate with sexuality, reproduction, and creation, to provide categories with which to discuss process and model. Any language, of course, has its limitations and liabilities, but these terms move us away from the academic theological language into a language much closer to the earth and the experience of the body. This language also taps into a process which God has used very artistically for a very long time in creating works of art!

MODEL

Conception

Revelation is such a fundamental concept for notion in the Christian community and in all religious systems. To a significant degree, however, revelation in the Christian tradition has become a fixed concept, frozen as it were, in the pages of the Bible, and especially in times where a type of biblical idolatry has run strong.

But there is another understanding of revelation, much more akin to how the biblical writers understood it, which perceives God continually at work revealing himself. This latter revelation occurs moment by moment in the unfolding of the human narrative, is incredibly liquid and unpredictable... and is ultimately the source for new life, serendipity spontaneity, and creativity.

Anyone who sets his face to the creation of art must in some way come into contact with the experience of revelation. Luis Alonso Schokel, quoted by Jabusch, suggests the same, saying, "A great artist begins with an intuition..."¹ and Langer names it "utmost conceptual power, imagination."²

Choan-Seng Song suggests a Japanese word "satori" to present a concept to hold what I am pushing at.

¹Luis Alonso Schokel, The Inspired Word (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965) p. 186.

²Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953) p. 40.

'Satori,' as Daisetz Suzuki puts it, may be defined as an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it. Practically, it means the unfolding of a new world unperceived in the confusion of a dualistically trained mind.

'Satori' opens for us a door into the dimension of things hidden for us so far. It enables us to see the reality behind and beyond phenomena and to penetrate the barriers that hinder us from seeing the true nature of things. Needless to say, this satori is akin to the revelation on which Christian faith depends.³

Behind every sermon start, I suggest, there must be an experience of revelation, of intuition, of satori. Such an experience may well emerge from an exegetical encounter, with the biblical text, from an everyday life experience, from a dream another work of art, or as some suggest of Luther, while sitting relieving his bowels.

I choose to call this experience of revelation conception. It is that moment when ideas come together... or experiences come together to reveal what was previously hidden, or in the terms of our language, a new life is created.

The language of conception also implies directly the participation of more than one in the process. I am suggesting that revelation always occurs in the context of community, whether it be the community of the artist and a given text, the community of the artist and the Spirit of God... of the artist and the community called church, or of the artist and the community called world.

³Choan-Seng Song, Third Eye Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979) p. 46.

It is precisely within this community context that the preacher is called upon to do the kind of hermeneutical work which is the conception point for effective preaching. I am not speaking of some superficial interaction of text and context, but rather of the indepth work as suggested by Segundo in his hermeneutical circle. In this working model the preacher has a tool to ask the critical questions, to move beyond mere acceptance of existing theologies and ideologies, and to move beyond the exegetical work which sustains them. For indeed the preacher must move to a new hermeneutic, a new and fresh understanding of his sources if the sermon is to unearth treasure previously buried and lead to new insight for the hearer.

Gestation

Several years ago I was doing a preaching series at a private high school, using a combination of Psalms and metal sculptures to express what I hoped to say. A friend, who writes poetry, was present for one of the sessions... and he identified at first glance what was the conceptual source for the sculpture I was using. We went on to talk about a poem of his, at that time recently published, on the same theme... discussing in particular the length of time it took to get from conceptual idea to the finished piece. He said it took nine years to finish the poem. The sculpture took a few hours.

Whatever length of time it takes, there is a period of time, from conception to delivery, properly called gestation. Sermons too, and especially if they are to be an art form, require this kind of time. It is unlikely that a sermon springing from a conceptual moment at midnight on Saturday will be more than an embryo by Sunday morning!

In the process of sermon development, therefore, there must be time and space allowed for gestation, or in terms of the Creative Catastrophe Model, incubation. From the life style of Jesus it is taking time to go to the mountains to pray, or finding a quiet place. This time is interior time, time to reflect and meditate upon the sum total of life's learning and experience.

This time also allows for the kind of synthesis of a variety of experiences in the life of the preacher. Here the creative mixing and juxtaposing of seemingly removed ideas and events can generate new images, new metaphors for the task of preaching. In this space material can be evaluated and sorted, arranged and re-arranged, until the combinations begin to create the body of a sermon. However orgasmic and electrifying a conceptual moment may be, a fetus requires time to grow. A fetal sermon develops from the ingredients of the sum total of a preacher's life experience and learning. To that embryo must be brought all of the theological expertise, all the forces at play within the various levels of community.

At the same time, as Schokel suggests, the preacher needs to be able to detach himself sufficiently from the womb so as not to be consumed by the womb and the task, or to create what is developing there simply in his own image.⁴ The detachment allows the embryo, what is growing there, to develop toward a life of its own, to be prepared to be set free to be experienced and interpreted by whomever may hear and participate in its birth.

The concept of insight is often used in the way I have used revelation and intuition to lead to the conceptual moment. I would rather speak of insight as something which happens during gestation, or perhaps as a sign that the pregnancy has come to full term. Insight is that conceptual moment, that revelatory idea, given enough flesh to have genuine depth and meaning. What was just a glimmer has now become light... has become insight.

A sermon thus reaches a point where it is ready to be preached, or where it even demands to be preached. The preacher may well look forward to the delivery with excitement and anticipation.

The pressures of weekly preaching sometimes means that a sermon must be preached before it is ready. However, that same pressure may lead the preacher to a disciplined use of time for the process. It is also a fallacy to assume that any artist produces without the pressure of time lines, whether they are internally or externally experienced.

⁴Schokel, p. 186.

Birthing Event

The depth of the preacher may be the womb, but the pulpit is the birthing place. And the work of art that is born there is the event of the preaching. The power in preaching is the happening, the event.

Delivery rooms are places of great drama. Grand events happen there. They are places of enormous anguish, of hard work and pain, of inexpressable joy and relief, of tears of suffering and tears of joy. They most often reflect the joy of new life, but they also know the agony of the stillborn.

Pulpits are like delivery rooms. Grand events may happen there. They are scenes, as Joseph Sittler suggested, where the Anguish of Preaching happens.⁵ Pulpits are places for enormous hard work and pain, and inexpressable joy and relief. They may well be places for tears of suffering or tears of joy. They may reflect life or the agony of the stillborn.

In these latter days when men are once again allowed into the delivery rooms of hospitals to become participants in birthing events, it has become obvious to this pastor, that they come away from the birthing event changed. There is in their eyes and their behavior a new experience of awe.

Congregations need the experience of the birthing event in the pulpit. They need to be participants in the

⁵ Joseph Sittler, The Anguish of Preaching (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

process, know the anguish, the drama, the joy and the pain. The pulpit ought not simply to be the waiting room outside where the baby is brought to show to the waiting father or visitors.

Langer speaks of the "canonical context," that place of rigid limits and restricting traditions.⁶ The church and the pulpit may be the most canonical of contexts, but I believe that it is a context for art. I would further suggest that few artists have the kind of supporting community and the freedom in which to create as the church provides for the preacher. In this context it is possible for the preaching event to be abstract, plastic and expressive.

At first glance, Susanne Langer's definition of art as that which creates the illusion of real feeling does not seem to be particularly helpful in discussing the sermon as art. The illusion, for Susanne Langer, however, is a real symbol of feeling. When this illusion coincides with real feeling living in the hearers or viewers, art happens.⁷ I would suggest that a sermon is an event when it coincides with the real feeling and living of the community.

I also find it helpful to think in the terms of Garrison, that the sermon event expresses the highest spiritual realities, that it gives expression to what cannot be otherwise expressed.⁸ Rice's suggestion that the artist's

⁶Langer, p. 46.

⁷Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁸W. E. Garrison, "Religion As Art," Christian Century 101: 10 (March 1984) 307. A reprint of an editorial originally published in 1924.

task is to unearth treasure by opening eyes may even come closer.⁹

A broad look at all these writers finds them articulating a very similar understanding of something happening in the art event which goes beyond craftsmanship, that pushes deeper, and reveals what was previously hidden. I am simply suggesting that for preaching, the pulpit and the kairos moment it brings is the event to which they point.

The barriers to calling birthing event an art form rest in the weight of the traditional understanding of art forms, a legacy of preaching which is anything but art, and a reluctance on the part of preachers to work under the more universal categories of art forms.

Life on its own

A word needs to be spoken to two more issues which follow close upon the birthing event in the delivery room, the pulpit.

First, a preaching event in process and completed truly has a life of its own. It is free to live and die, to be understood, misunderstood, and interpreted in an incredibly diverse number of ways. In fact, if the sermon has met the categories of abstraction, plasticity and expressiveness, it will be received in the broadest possible diversity.

⁹Charles L. Rice, Interpretation and Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970) p. 45.

Secondly, few if any preaching events have the capacity to be born and born again. The sermon from last week is the sermon from last week. Re-hashing it rarely recreates the initial birthing event. Everything has changed in that amount of time. The task of preaching is a journey experience and has little to do with creating literary works which stand the pressure of repeated readings and hearings.

Summary

The entire model, of conception, gestation, birthing event, and life on its own, can finally be overlaid on the Creative Catastrophe Model. In this way it is possible to visualize conception as a reality emerging from the seedbed of accumulated data and the hermeneutical dialectic of text and context. From conception the sermon may move either through a smooth transition to the sermon event, or through a path which consciously uses the process of gestation or incubation, pushing for illumination or insight. Either route is designed to end in a birthing event, with the interior route targeting to tap creative energies at another level.

The birthing event results in a sermon, which, once delivered, assumes a life of its own. This life, however, is in the context of a given community and becomes a part of the accumulated data which formulates the seedbed for the process to begin again. The sermon becomes community

property to influence and in turn to be shaped as it re-
enters the circle of experience.

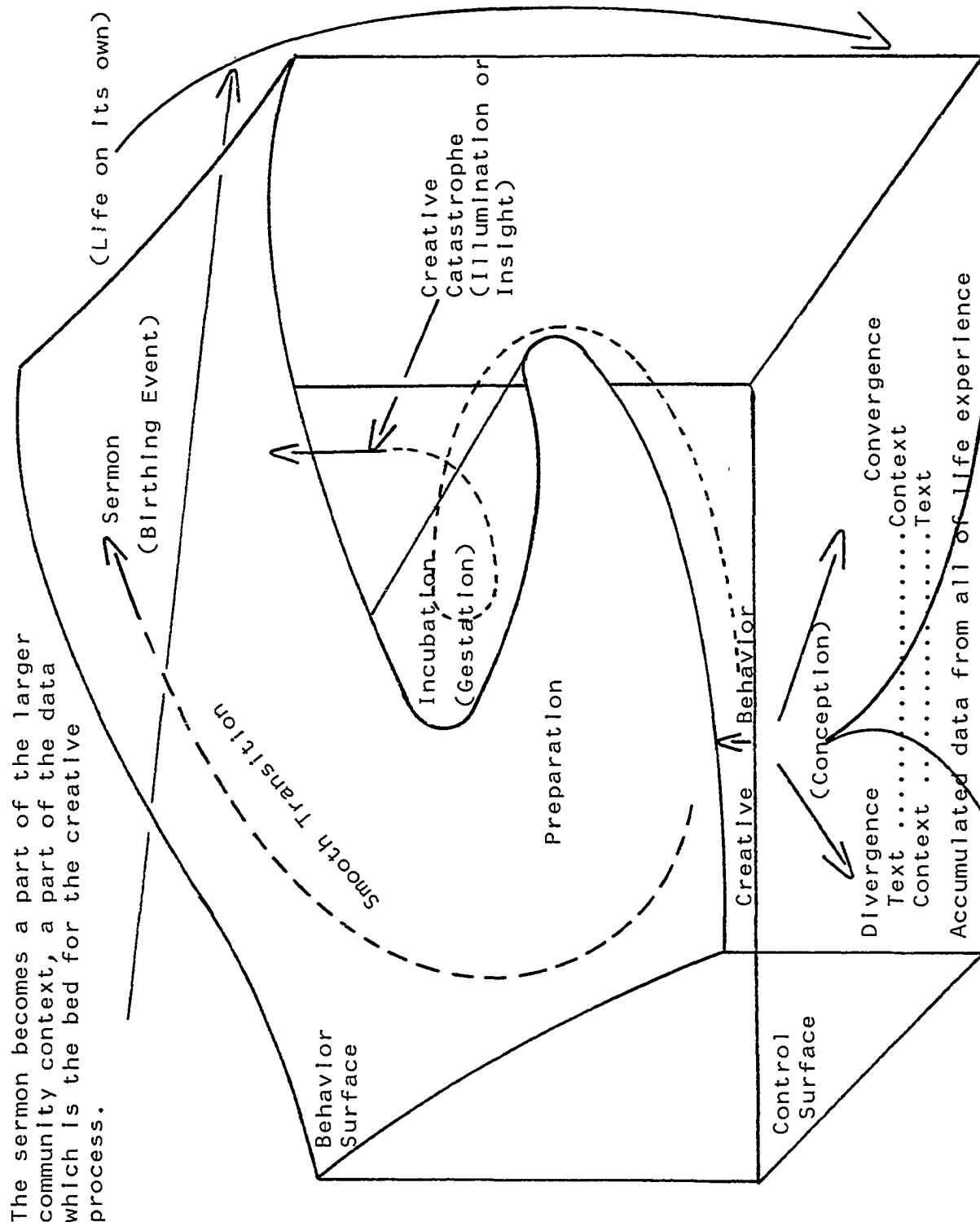


Fig. 5 Expanded Creative Catastrophe Model

DIALOGUE OF MODELS

The building of models and an awareness of sermon development process runs through the corpus of preaching literature. Options are available to the preacher involving the most simple and basic to the incredibly detailed and complex.

I am intrigued by the parallels to my model reflected in the cryptic process outlined by John Jasper, a significant nineteenth century black preacher.

First, I read my Bible until a text gets hold of me. Then I go down to the James River and work it in. Then I get into my pulpit and preach it out.¹⁰

This brief account obviously moves in the same steps as my model of conception, gestation and birthing. He does not, however, elaborate upon the process or provide insight into the workings of the process.

Among the standard volumes on preaching literature, the work of John Broadus continues to stand as significant. He provides a broad definition of the sermon seedbed, including,

... all of a minister's past study, all of his reading, meditation, prayer, all pastoral ministration, all open-eyed contacts with the world of men contribute something to the groundwork and superstructure of every sermon.¹¹

¹⁰Richard Day, Rhapsody in Black: The Life Story of John Jasper (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1953) p. 117.

¹¹John A. Broadus, On the Preparation and Delivery Of Sermons (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944) p. 293.

He continues his discussion of process with a brief and helpful summary of the methodologies employed by pulpit giants of the past. They sound strange to ears schooled in Biblical-exegetical methodologies and committed to biblically based preaching, where the text is always the starting point.

Dr. George Buttrick, out of his own practice, suggests the following: (1) Choose your subject and text. The order of choice will vary. (2) Study the text in its context until you get its meaning and mood. (3) Study the text in commentaries. (4) Pass the text through your own experience, jotting down any ideas that occur, and reminders of happenings, quotations, passages in books. Often in a day or two an amorphous mass of material, more than can be used, will be at hand. (5) Brood over the material in mind. 'Let the sun go down a day or two upon a sermon: The subconscious mind must do its part.' (6) 'Let the imagination have liberty.' (7) Then write the sermon--not as an essay is written, with only the subject in mind, but as a sermon--with the eyes of the congregation looking at the writer over his desk.¹²

The methodology of Buttrick, as reported by Broadus, obviously takes very seriously the gestation process I am talking about. He only brushes by conception, but expressions like, "passing the text through the mind," "brood over the material," and "let the imagination have liberty," reflect a genuine concern for a period of incubation or gestation.

Broadus affirms this step in the process as he reviews the process of other pulpiteers. He refers to the practice of Dr. S. Parkes Cadmans "to con over it,"

¹²Ibid., p. 297.

and to the "mental digestion" of Dr. H. A. Prichards.¹³

Another voice from the older standard literature, Andrew Blackwood, takes very seriously the conception stage. He writes of sermon "seed-thoughts" and the possibility of their happening in text and context, in the study, "outside the study," from private "seed-plot," and simply from the "church year."¹⁴

Blackwood outlines a thorough-going fifteen-step process. One of these steps allows time, "to let the matter incubate for awhile." At this point Blackwood's use of incubate could be understood in a manner similar to my use of gestation.¹⁵

Clyde E. Fant describes the process of sermon development as a movement through three phases. The first he names "creative chaos," a time of disorder and exciting germination. He does not conclude this process by naming it something like conception, but the implication is clear. Phase two is not clearly named, but it is a time of sorting and sifting, making decisions on inclusion and exclusion. Clearly he implies a kind of gestation process which moves the sermon to readiness for delivery. The final phase is concerned with taking what has been created and making it into "something sayable." The concern Fant is expressing is the challenge of developing a sermon into an oral event

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Andrew W. Blackwood, The Preparation of Sermons (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1948) p. 36ff.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 43.

and not a written event. His process resembles in large part the process I am suggesting for sermon development, with the major difference being the use of imagery.¹⁶

Elizabeth Achtemeier affirms the critical need for working in the tension of a hermeneutical dialectic.

The meaning of a biblical passage is not contained solely within the Bible. It is found at the point where the biblical passage and the situation of the congregation meet... at the point of crux, of crossing, of crisis. The text interprets the situation; the situation shapes the interpretation.¹⁷

The place where exegetical inquiry begins, for Elizabeth Achtemeier, is at that delicate balance point between text and context. At that point the preacher, through practice of exegetical skill and theological understanding, seeks to "get the story straight."¹⁸ As I understand Elizabeth Achtemeier, the conception of the sermon happens at this juncture.

She describes the next step in the process as "listening to the text." This is a time of "brooding over it, and of meditating and praying over it..."¹⁹ Her concern here is similar to my concern for a period of gestation, a time where the sermon develops and begins to build identity and authority.

In her later work, Elizabeth notes that the development process is often hindered because of lack of training in Christian Theology. Preachers are thus unable to

¹⁶ Clyde F. Fant, Preaching For Today (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) p. 135.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Achtemeier, Creative Preaching: Finding The Words (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980) p. 56.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 44ff.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

effectively bring the message to bear on the issues of society which are in front of them.²⁰

The final step in her process is passion. Her focus is not on some kind of emotion in the delivery, but rather on a deep and genuine love for the people, grounded in knowing their joys and sorrows. In these terms, she expresses a deep concern for the sermon as an event grounded in a participating community.²¹

Although Elizabeth Achtemeier uses different imagery, her process concerns are similar to my own. She also allows considerable room for preachers to work with her imagery in developing their own process.

Bryson and Taylor express genuine concern for finding the "seed" or conception point, in developing a sermon process.²² They move, however, in a false direction, as they develop the sermon idea. Their target is to get to a proposition... a logical, rational proposition. To submit to this methodology is to again sell the preaching soul to Greek, logical, rational methodology. Sermons from this mold are more likely to be lectures than events of the Word.

Bryson and Taylor, in turn, give little aid to image the birthing event. While they speak of basic rhetorical skills, the excitement of the unfolding of an art/Word event is missing from the process. They miss the

²⁰Elizabeth Achtemeier, Preaching As Theology And Art (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984) p. 14.

²¹Achtemeier, Creative Preaching, p. 56ff.

²²Harold T. Bryson and James C. Taylor, Building Sermons To Meet People's Needs (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980) p. 55.

sense of drama which Achtemeier captures in her use of "passion" and which I believe is part of the delivery room in the birthing process.²³

Eugene Lowry offers one of the more suggestive books in preaching literature. Lowry speaks of the sermonic or homiletic idea as the basis for a sermon. In attempting to develop a way to recognize such an idea when it happens, Lowry develops a definition. "A sermon idea is a homiletical bind..." With more clarity he speaks of this as the "itch," and suggests that,

"... the sermon always begins with the itch and moves to the scratch... from the human predicament to the solution born of the Gospel."²⁴

He further describes the step of idea generation, as a time of "wandering thoughtfulness." He moves quickly from here to a second preliminary stage called, "decision," where the shape of an idea is settled. This two-stage process, in fact, corresponds well to what I am suggesting in conception, a process wherein a wandering thoughtful sperm and an egg merge to make it all begin.²⁵ The end of this process seems to be the "itch," the "bind," the problem which needs to be solved or resolved.²⁶

The logical next step is to propose a solution or resolution, as the "scratch," relieving the itch. I am not convinced, however, that we ought to always think of sermons as a movement from "itch to scratch." My sense

²³Ibid., p. 81ff.

²⁴Eugene L. Lowry, The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon As Narrative Art Form (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980) p. 21.

²⁵Ibid., p. 17ff.

²⁶Ibid., p. 83.

of the preaching of Jesus is that the scratch more often created the itch. The preaching of Jesus often left people more uncomfortable than comfortable. In this sense, the preaching of Jesus often "scratched" off the band-aids, developing more itch, but in the process clearing the way for genuine healing. A sermon might well be effective not because of the solution it proposes, but for the questions it shapes and sharpens for the listener, and for the process of true healing which is thus initiated.

There is also a significant danger here of falling into what may be the easiest rut for preachers to run in. This rut creates "how to" sermons, not events of the Word. These ruts are also easily used as outer manipulation rather than for inner transformation.

Eugene Lowry does offer, however, an interesting model for narrative plot development. It reflects a process not unlike the Creative Catastrophe Model in Chapter 3, as it provides for inner space for incubation and models a vehicle for surprise reversals in direction.

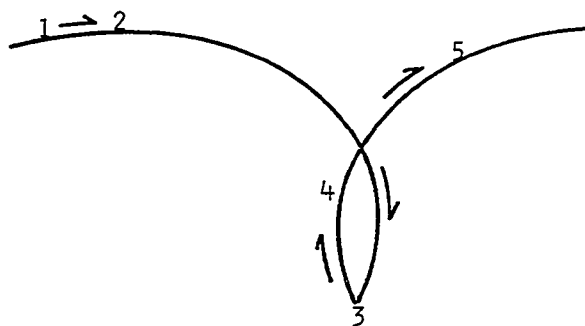


Fig. 6 Eugene Lowry Model for Narrative Plot Development

He suggests a five-stage process,

1) Upsetting the equilibrium, 2) analyzing the discrepancy, 3) disclosing the clue to resolution, 4) experiencing the gospel, and 5) anticipating the consequences.²⁷

The process is understood as sequence rather than structure, and thus open for exception and violation. It offers a way for creative insight to work its way into sermon development. By naming the stages, however, he tends to lock sermons into his earlier movement from itch to scratch.

It would be interesting to build into his model the additional dynamics which are present in the creative catastrophe model, namely, the tension of divergence and convergence to text and context which creates the energy for artistic preaching, and the alternative smooth transition sermon route. Finally, I would suggest that his model is not really open to the kind of playful caprice which is possible in the creative catastrophe model.

No contemporary student of preaching can ignore the work of Fred Craddock, who has made significant contributions to the literature of preaching. Craddock also discusses sermon development process, using language similar to the language I have chosen.

He speaks directly of the conception of the sermon idea,

²⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

... There has to be a germ. It may spring from a text or from the life situation of the congregation. The place of origin is not important so long as both text and congregation are permitted to respond to each other.²⁸

Craddock breaks my proposed gestation process into two steps. The first is called, "playing with the idea," involving opening "all the faculties," permitting the idea to trigger thoughts, feelings, memories, former ideas, etc. He ends this process by "arriving at clarity," which I understand to be a point where the idea speaks clearly to an issue or concern arising from "contextual and textual analysis."²⁹

When I speak of gestation, I am speaking of a similar process, which moves the conceptual idea or moment from a microscopic entity to a fully developed and clearly recognizable creation, ready for the birthing event.

Craddock concludes by speaking of "method of sharing," as I might speak of "birthing." He makes a very significant suggestion to the nature of the "birthing event," proposing that rather than simply announcing the conclusion reached in the process, that the process be repeated or shared in capsule form to enable the congregation to arrive at the same conclusion.³⁰

The images of conception, gestation and birth are also evoked in the work of Eric Hoefler. In his discussion of "the process of sermon creation," he also uses the term

²⁸Fred B. Craddock, As One Without Authority (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974) p. 160.

²⁹Ibid., p. 16ff.

³⁰Ibid., p. 162ff.

"conception." He does not, however, define an understanding of the term, except to say that it can happen anywhere. From the point of conception Hoefler elaborates an eight-step process which obviously reflects a genuine concern for gestation or incubation. The steps tend to be tedious, however, overworking this part of the process. I believe Hoefler confuses his images when he suggests that the sermon is "born" at the pastor's desk. In defining his use of "born" it becomes clear that what he is talking about is something more akin to how I speak of conception and gestation. The "pastor's desk" becomes a kind of womb where the sermon is shaped.

He grasps clearly the hermeneutical tension of text and context which is the source of preaching. "We must struggle and fight at this meeting point of world and word until we are blessed..."³¹ The meeting point, for Hoefler, is symbolized by the pastor's desk, and it becomes the centering point for the parish.

Hoefler completes his book with a detailed and helpful sketch of writing and delivery skills, but fails to complete the sermon process with the word-event of preaching/birthing. I would suggest that his movement from conception to birth before reaching the pulpit risks reducing preaching from an awesome event participated in by pastor and congregation to a carefully constructed reporting on

³¹Richard Carl Hoefler, Creative Preaching And Oral Writing (Lima, OH: C.S.S., 1978) p. 23-24.

what happened previously at the pastor's desk. The congregation is thus excluded from the delivery room and becomes simply a community waiting outside.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to construct a model for sermon development process, shaped in broad strokes to allow for a maximum in flexibility in its use. The process of model building and the examination of other models reveals a broad similarity in the basic themes, though often carried in different imagery. Almost without exception the three basic steps of conception, gestation and birthing event appear in most of the preaching literature. Each one, however, tends to place the emphasis on different portions of the process.

A variety of concerns arise in the perusal of the literature in dialogue with the model I am proposing. First, they sometimes are quite complex, detailing a large number of steps. In this complexity, they have a tendency to be binding and limiting in their working out in the pastor's study and in the pulpit. Secondly, I am concerned that the understanding of the nature of or the goal of preaching is not really faithful to an understanding which seems to emerge from the preaching of Jesus. The goal is often propositional and problem solving, rather than the inviting presentation of the Gospel. The literature also gives a rather low profile to the importance of the creativity

of the preacher in the whole process. This low profile is coupled with very little understanding of the preacher as an artist and preaching as an art form. The end result is incredibly important for the self understanding of the preacher.

The preacher's self-understanding may be very critical in the end product of the whole process, the sum total impact of the sermon/art/event in the community.

In contrast, I believe the strengths of the model I have sketched here are found in these three areas: A basic simplicity which allows for maximum freedom for the preacher in working with the model; the possibility for discovering the model in the life and preaching of Jesus; and in the serious concern it holds for the creativity and artistry of the preacher.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

With the consummate skill and patience of the seasoned professional, the golfer trods the grass of the fairway, looking for the golf ball. A practiced eye picks out the ball from the grass and the mushrooms. Firm fingers turn it slowly to examine the trademark, ascertaining that this is both a golf ball and the correct ball for this particular shot. An intuitive eye, honed by experience, measures the shot and selects the club. When all is in readiness, the golfer addresses the ball. Confidence creeps from the golfer to the gallery. The sense is there that this moment is all put together and ready to be stroked.

A complex matter, this business of golfing. The requirements in preparation are enormous. Countless hours of practice, reflection and meditation come to bear on each swing of the club. Each stroke requires the integration of an enormous variety of skills and experiences. A thousand variables from the wind to a blade of grass await the swing of the club.

But this is an artist at work. No duffers here. There is a pursuit of excellence being played out on the course.

There is a rhythm and dance at play here. The shot is conceived, all is set carefully in place, the feet are planted, the ball is addressed, the backswing begins

and then the stroke and the follow-through. Smooth easy process to the viewer, but to those who know, this moment is but the culmination of hours and hours of preparation.

The moment comes and is gone. The ball is set in motion. The ball hits, rolls, stops, the moment is over. How fleeting the event!

Perfect shots are rare, good shots common, poor ones are also common, total disasters are not unknown. One is not able to linger long on the perfect shot or the disaster. The next shot looms on the next tee.

Of such is the doing of theology and methodology in the creative and artistic enterprise of the preacher.

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